

THE Christian CENTURY

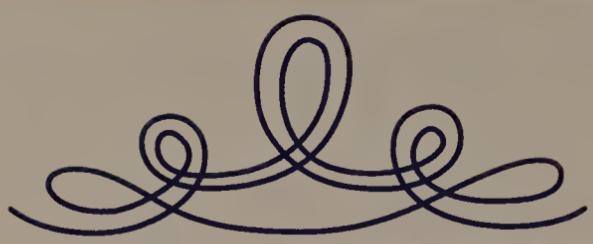
Thinking Critically. Living Faithfully.



Mentors

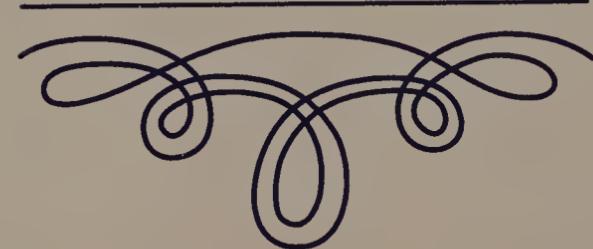
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Editor's DESK

by John M. Buchanan

Members only?

WHEN THE CHURCH was under siege, the ritual of passing the peace was important to members who were meeting in secret and literally holding on to one another for dear life. Today it's meant to serve an important function in worship.

But I have come to dread this part of the service. I have visited two small congregations several times lately. Both include the passing of the peace. The presiding clergyperson invites worshipers to greet one another with a handshake and the words "Peace be with you." (Why don't we say, "The peace of Christ be with you"? We don't mean the generic 1960s peace that was communicated with a V sign.)

After the clergyperson says, "The peace of the Lord be with you," and we respond, "And also with you," all hell breaks loose. People leave their seats, walk around and greet nearly everyone else in the room. Robust conversations ensue. There is laughter, sometime raucous, as two members share an inside joke. People discuss the results of a football game or yesterday's storm. As a visitor, I shake the hands of the people immediately around me and then venture tentatively into the aisle. There I encounter a barrier that might as well be a sign announcing "Members Only." I'm on my own and not sure what to do. I feel as if I've intruded in someone else's family

reunion. I slink back to my pew, pick up the hymnal and read a few verses.

The ritual that's intended to affirm community often does anything but that if you happen to be a visitor. Instead, congregation members are communicating clearly to strangers that their church is a closed corporation.

To be fair, in both congregations there was a person who seemed to understand what was happening and greeted me warmly, asking my name. But most were busy renewing existing relationships.

The same dynamic is in place at the coffee hour. Good friends, longtime members of the congregation, are so happy to see one another that a visitor may stand apart and alone, balancing a coffee cup and cookie and carefully examining the pattern of the tiles in the fellowship hall ceiling.

The hospitality of welcoming the stranger is not only good manners but also Christian spiritual practice. But sometimes a Christian ritual that's meant to affirm community, love and unity among believers can be exclusive, awkward and off-putting to people who are new or not part of the community. When this becomes true about the passing of the peace, when it's become a liturgical social hour for members only, we need to reevaluate it.

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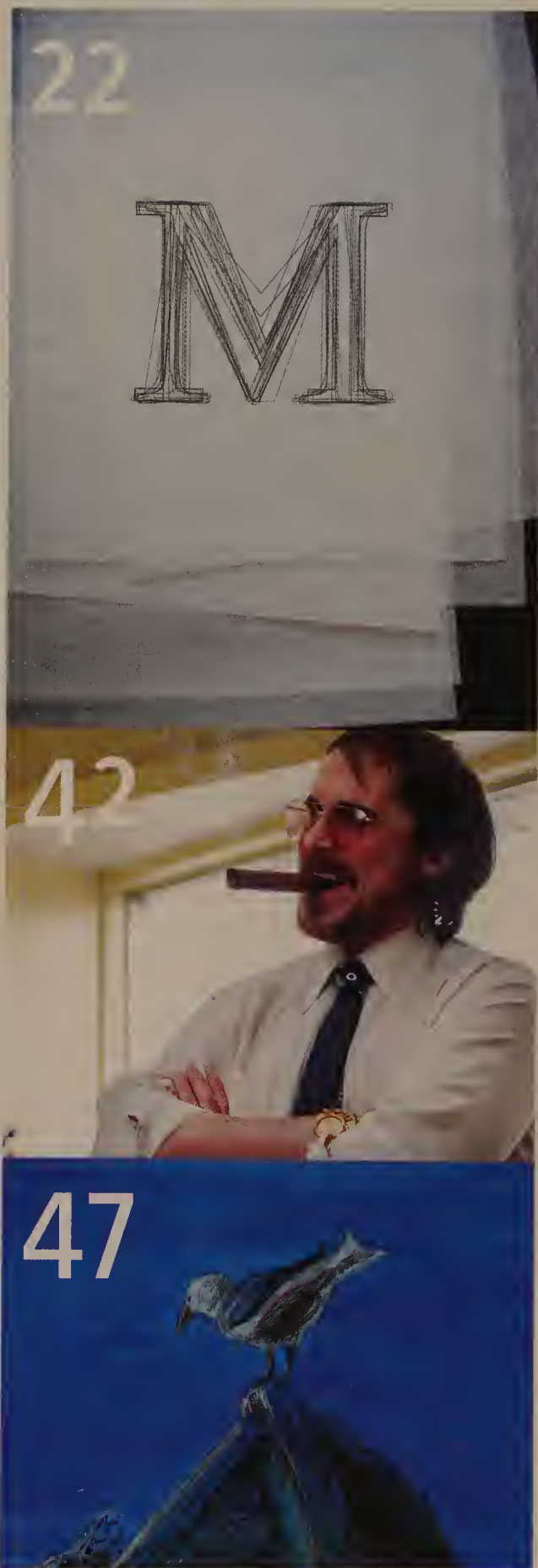
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Unity in the Spirit

Joanna Harader faced what are challenging subjects for any conference (“So much for ‘unity,’” Dec. 25). It is heartening to hear that she no longer feels responsible—her actions merely highlighted the already present disunity. While you can share a conference and a name, you do not always share fundamental agreement on the nature of the scriptures, sexuality and Jesus’ teaching on marriage. There is the warmth of fellowship in Christ, but with disagreement on such fundamental issues, you cannot have unity of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not leading everyone into all truth or some (or all) are not hearing the Spirit well.

Dave Patchin

christiancentury.org comment

In my denomination, officers take vows to maintain the “peace, unity and purity” of the church. I have long maintained that a fourth element is missing: transformation. Harader’s story speaks of transformation, something the church of the 21st century desperately needs. But transformation is often at odds with other values we have held dear.

MaryAnn McKibben Dana

christiancentury.org comment

A complex warrior . . .

As evidenced in his review of Jerome Creach’s *Violence in Scripture* (“Warrior God,” Dec. 25), Walter Brueggemann not only loves the sacred text but respects its many facets. His suggestion that God is a complicated character brought a new level of thought to me—that God is very much in process, learning from experience, as we are. This flies in the face of all “triumphalist” theologies wherein “god” is an absolute entity and also in the face of supersessionist hermeneutics that can easily dismiss portions of the text in favor of other parts. What we have in the text is a divine being utterly complex and perhaps given

to violence, struggling all along the way to figure out what makes sense, what builds the world, what sustains the community—both the smaller (called out) and the larger (the whole wide world).

Tom Eggebeen

christiancentury.org comment

Poets and church . . .

Carol Zaleski’s “Poetry and dogma” (Dec. 25) brought to mind a line I’ve underlined in Barbara Brown Taylor’s book *Leaving Church*: “Both in Clarksville and elsewhere the poets began drifting away from the church as the jurists grew louder and more insistent. I began to feel like a defense attorney for those who could not square their love of God and neighbor with the terms of the Nicene creed.”

It seems to me that it is the poetry that feeds the soul. I am missing it in my church.

Janette Johnson Hearne

Houston, Tex.

Calculating clergy taxes . . .

The news article “Clergy tax break under review” (Dec. 25) missed an important point. Clergy who claim a housing allowance (and therefore pay no federal income tax on that amount of their compensation) are considered self-employed by the IRS. Consequently, they pay both the employee and employer share of their Social Security contribution. In some cases, like mine, the Social Security amount is less than what the federal income tax on the housing allowance would be. The article did not note this reduction in the extra income. I am aware of one caveat, however. Some congregations voluntarily pay the employer’s share of Social Security for their clergy; in those cases the example cited in the article would be correct.

Everett J. Thomas

Goshen, Ind.

The bountiful Psalter . . .

I believe what Martin Tel writes about the importance of using the whole Psalter (“Necessary songs,” Jan. 8). Thomas Merton had something similar to say.

I read from the Psalter more than from any other scripture. Sometimes psalms verbalize my rational thoughts, often my happy feelings and sometimes my anger, frustration, fear, disappointments, resentments, joy, sorrow—and on and on. Give thanks to God. God’s mercy endureth forever. Ah, and the sea monsters. Hallelujah. It’s all poetry, so I don’t have to figure it out.

Jim Prevatt

christiancentury.org comment

Running sacred . . .

I see Sweaty Sheep as still evolving and defining themselves as a community (“Worship on the run,” Dec. 25). I know Ryan Althaus and Alex Becker, two exceptional young men who carry on this unusual ministry. They recently had a fund-raiser to provide running shoes for homeless people. They secured the services and good prices of two running-shoe stores in Louisville. Feet were measured and shoes fitted. That preaches!

Bill Holmes

Louisville, Ky.

The church needs to be careful not to “churchify” something good in people’s lives. An exercise community may be one of the sacred places. Pastors can learn from the people who exercise regularly with others regarding their spiritual quests for identity, discipleship and community. For many people, a fitness community is church.

Paul Koch

christiancentury.org comment

January 22, 2014

Investment option

Though churches go to considerable effort to arrange mentoring programs for seminarians and young pastors, crucial acts of mentoring still take place in unexpected ways and places. They occur whenever someone invests time and energy in another person and cares enough to challenge that person's behavior and encourage his or her gifts. For reasons that remain somewhat inexplicable, a particular relationship creates a moment ripe for learning and growth. When that happens, it's a moment of grace.

"Mentoring isn't something someone really does intentionally," commented Samuel Kamaleson, a Methodist leader in Asia and an executive with World Vision International who is known for mentoring mission leaders. "It is a compulsion that comes on you, that makes you weigh relationship as being the primary emphasis in all of life."

Kamaleson recently told the Faith and Leadership blog that as a youth he was a poor mathematics student and was turned over to a tutor. "I went to see him with fear and trembling. I thought he was going to bring the rod down on me. But he asked me to sit, and he brought me breakfast. Then he gave me my first lesson in geometry, and I have never forgotten that lesson. The man taught me that I was valuable, because he would spend time with me."

Over the recent years, this magazine has published an increasing number of articles that share personal reflections on ministry. That increase reflects in part a wider interest in memoirs of ministry and faith. It also reflects the realization that ministry is not for lone rangers. Ministry is an undertaking of the entire church, and ministers flourish when they share their experience and reflect on it with others.

Writing about ministry is one way of sharing that experience. Writing is not usually included among the central tasks of ministry, yet it is key to much of it. After all, behind every sermon is the craft of choosing words and deciding how to tell a story to make a point or enliven the imagination.

The ability of those at the front lines of ministry to reflect on their experience and write about it has always been crucial to the life of this magazine. That ability is displayed in a new way in this issue's essays on mentors (see p. 22), and we look forward to publishing more such essays in future issues.

Mentoring happens when someone invests time and energy in another person.

CENTURY marks

EAT YOUR VEGGIES: After decades as a mortician in East Baltimore, Erich March became concerned about the way people in his neighborhood were dying prematurely from obesity, hypertension and diabetes. The deaths were linked to a poor diet. March and his wife opened a grocery store, called Apples & Oranges, that sells healthy food and teaches people how to prepare it. The store doesn't carry sugary sodas, cigarettes or lottery tickets. March said he was motivated by his Catholic faith and the example of his parents, who often provided funeral services free of charge (*U.S. Catholic*, December).

ATHEISM IN A NEW LIGHT: Chris Arnade has a Ph.D. in physics. He worked on Wall Street for 20 years. He counted himself among the atheists who enjoy nothing more than poking holes in the Bible and making fun of Christians.

Richard Dawkins was his hero. He quit his Wall Street job to photograph homeless people in the Bronx. The homeless people he met, including the addicts and prostitutes, undermined his atheism. For many of them, faith was what got them through life. "I've been reminded that life is not as rational as Richard Dawkins sees it. Perhaps atheism is an intellectual luxury for the wealthy," said Arnade (*Guardian*, December 24).

UNHOLY WAR: When Muslim-Christian conflict broke out recently in the Central African Republic, Archbishop Dieudonné Nzapalainga opened the doors of his church to shelter Christians. He also welcomed his friend Imam Oumar Kobine Layama, the most senior imam in the country, whose life was in danger from Christians who were seeking revenge. The archbishop, the imam and a leading Protestant cleric

had been traveling about the country trying to head off conflict with the message, "We are brothers." Although interreligious tension has been building for years, the recent conflict was precipitated by the overthrow of the government by Muslim forces, which put in place the first Muslim president (*New York Times*, December 23).

GOD AND WORLD: The universe is both distinct from God and loved by God, according to Christian theology. Such a view of the universe, says theologian John F. Haught, makes room for the concept of evolution. A world that is truly other than God has autonomy and therefore the freedom to develop spontaneously in its own, contingent manner. A God that truly loves the world will not coerce it to change but rather work with it through persuasive love. "If God is love, and not controlling power, the world will be given leeway to experiment with an array of creative possibilities"—what is considered randomness in evolutionary science (*Sewanee Theological Review*, Michaelmas).

CHARISMATIC RENEWAL? At the invitation of Justin Welby, archbishop of Canterbury, representatives of Chemin Neuf ("New Way"), a Catholic-based charismatic community, are moving into Lambeth Palace, the archbishop of Canterbury's residence in London. Welby discovered this group before he became a priest and while working for an oil company in France. Chemin Neuf was founded 40 years ago in France as a Catholic prayer group but has since become ecumenical. The group moving into Lambeth Palace includes a Catholic priest, an Anglican couple and a Lutheran seminarian (*American Interest*, December 18).



"You'll find there's no right or wrong here. Just what works for you."

ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE: Gratitude is like a muscle. A number of studies confirm that the more we express our gratitude, the more grateful we become and the more we have a bright outlook on life. In one study of high school students, the students who showed the highest levels of gratitude had better GPAs, less depression and envy. A focus on materialism had just the opposite effect on students. An attitude of gratitude is a virtue that is more caught than taught. Parents can instill thankfulness in their children by requiring them to do chores and then thanking them for doing them (*Wall Street Journal*, December 23).

BIG GOVERNMENT: Benjamin Radcliff, political scientist at the University of Notre Dame, has compared the size of government in different countries to the sense of well-being among its citizens. He concludes that “the smaller the government, the less happy people are.” Key to government providing a greater sense of well-being are measures that keep people in a capitalist economy from feeling as though they are “commodities.” Government programs that care for older people and the unemployed and free people to care for infant or ailing family members con-

“Those of us who are Christian need to acknowledge that over the history of the faith, there have been occasions when ‘a supposedly changeless truth has changed,’ as the great church historian and theologian Jaroslav Pelikan put it.”

— Columnist **E. J. Dionne**, commenting on shifting attitudes toward gay marriage (*Washington Post*, December 22)

“I do think that a major reason why reducing unemployment isn’t a political priority is that the economy may be lousy for workers, but corporate America is doing just fine.”

— Economist **Paul Krugman**, arguing that when unemployment is high, employers can make unrealistic demands on employees who are fearful of losing their jobs (*New York Times*, December 25)

tribute to a sense of well-being. People of all income levels benefit, as do both men and women (*Washington Post*, December 23).

HEALTH INDUSTRY: In 2011 Catholic hospitals received \$27 billion from public sources—almost half of their revenues. Some critics have charged that Catholic hospitals have been on a merger spree in recent years, creating corporate entities that are less sensitive to the needs of the

poor. Statistics from an American Civil Liberties Union/Merger Watch report seem to support this criticism. Catholic hospitals are now providing less care for the poor than other religious nonprofit hospitals and not much more than secular nonprofit hospitals. They also receive a lower percentage of revenue from Medicaid, the health insurance program for low-income and disabled folk, than any other type of hospital, including for-profit ones (*Mother Jones*, December 18).

TEN INTRIGUING RELIGIOUS BOOKS OF 2013

***My Bright Abyss: Meditation of a Modern Believer*, by Christian Wiman.**

When he learned he had a rare form of cancer at age 39, Wiman was the editor of *Poetry* magazine. Then a lapsed Christian, his brush with mortality triggered a return to belief, surrendering to its depth, mystery and wonderment.

***Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, by N. T. Wright.** In this magnum opus, Wright lays out his case for Paul as a thinker on par with Aristotle and Plato. Wright contends that Paul’s writings are to be understood as those of a devout Jew who reworks Jewish redemptive theology around the figure of Jesus.

***Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth*, by Reza Aslan.** Aslan’s premise, that Jesus of Nazareth preached socialism and plotted sedition against the Roman Empire, is not exactly original and

depends on a selective reading of the Gospels. But a YouTube clip of a Fox News interview with Aslan went viral and catapulted his book into the best-seller stratosphere.

***A Prayer Journal*, by Flannery O’Connor.** Penned nearly 80 years ago, these private journal entries have found the light of day thanks to a biographer’s diligent archival rummaging. The pages reveal O’Connor, then in her early twenties and attending the University of Iowa Writers’ Workshop, pouring out her soul to God in a manner that is both naive and brilliant.

***Coffee with Jesus*, by David Wilkie.** The cheeky, online comic strip that has gained a cult audience now bursts upon the world as a giftable, brightly hued coffee-table book. Jesus is the star, tossing sage and cryptic comebacks to goof-ball stock characters.

***God’s Forever Family: The Jesus People Movement in America*, by Larry Eskridge.** The nearly forgotten chapter of America’s Christian hippy revival comes to life in this history of the Jesus People movement, a fusion of utopian counterculture and soul-saving urgency.

***Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, and the Prison of Belief*, by Lawrence Wright.** Wright sets out to answer a question that had long mystified him: Why would reasonable people, especially Hollywood celebrities like Tom Cruise and John Travolta, risk their reputations and surrender their lives to a stigmatized, totalitarian regime? He soon learned the secret: it’s easy to get in, almost impossible to leave.

***Eat with Joy: Redeeming God’s Gift of Food*, by Rachel Marie Stone.** Stone presents a compelling case for sustainable food consumption that tones down foodie righteousness with common sense and awe of the sacred. “Better the occa-

sional meal shared with friends at McDonald’s than organic salad in bitter isolation,” writes Stone.

***Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition*, by Gary Anderson.** This study examines the concept of voluntary good works, almsgiving and philanthropy—paramount for Jews and Christians. Aiding those in need became understood as making a loan to God, or an investment in the Creation, and trusting in Providence that the good deed would be redeemed at a later time.

***Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*, by David Nirenberg.** A much broader pathology than anti-Semitism, anti-Judaism is wielded by Christians, Muslims, artists, philosophers, political theorists—and occasionally by Jews themselves—to describe any kind of obstinacy, superstition, literalism and deviancy that is worthy of contempt and annihilation.

—John Murawski (RNS)

Notes on loving your neighbor

BY BRIAN DOYLE

LOVE THY NEIGHBOR

as thyself . . . Aw, it's easy to love Mr. C., as he's the guy who cheerfully lends his tools to everyone on the street and gives away hatfuls of fresh redolent summer-savory tomatoes. He's the kind of guy who has an extra set of tire chains in his garage for when you suddenly have to drive over the mountain to retrieve a sick kid from college, and he says ah keep 'em until spring, son—it's not like I need them. It's easy to love that guy.

It's not as easy to love Mrs. M., who is a ferocious bitter snide supercilious gossip and loves to intimate darkly that easy drugs and easier sex are rife among the teenagers in the neighborhood. But it can be done, if you just smile and grind your teeth, and consider that at least she is not heavily armed, or the governor, or in charge of the national Twitter feed.

And it's just stone-cold not easy to love the guy down the street who parks all his huge vehicles in front of everyone else's house and was caught once dumping motor oil in the creek, and who more than once has spent the night passed out

cold in the moonscape of his garden. But you endure him, you say hey when you pass him in the street, and you talk a little sports, on the general theory that any flash of humanity might cool him out and maybe make him stop parking his Starfleet in front of tiny Mrs. H.'s cottage.

But what about arrogant thugs like Mr. Osama bin Laden, who murdered three of my friends 12 years ago? What about a neighbor like that? Because he was my neighbor, damn it, as much as I wish he was resident on Venus. That man roasted children on the airplanes. He fomented the murder of many thousands of his fellow Muslims. He's responsible for thousands of innocent people being blown apart and living their lives without limbs and dads and moms and brothers and sisters and daughters and sons. How can I love a preening twisted coward like that guy?

Because if I cannot even try, then I am a liar when I say I hear Christ. Because if I cannot find it in me to believe, reluctantly and furiously and disgruntled and raging against it all the way, that there

was some shard of holiness even in that slime, some flash of I Am Who Am, some breath of the Unimaginable One, then to say I am Christian is a foul and whopping lie.

We say we believe that all living things are holy. We say we believe that there is the Christ in every heart—Christ in us, as St. Paul says. We say we believe that he is not dead but resident in each and every person born of woman in this bruised and blessed world—a miracle.

But if the mysterious Word is alive in every heart, then he was in some chamber of even bin Laden's, and Hitler's, and Mao's, and Stalin's, and Pol Pot's—the endless parade of thugs that fill our newspapers and smartphones and history with their shrill crowing lies.

What? Criminals! Murderers! Their souls roast in hells fired by the eternal fuel of their evil egos!

Probably. But if you and I cannot believe that God made even them, breathed his love into their hearts as infants, gave them their chance to sing and share the Gift, then we are shameful liars. That is what Christianity demands. It is about love, period. It is not about easy love. That is the revolution of it, the incredible illogical unreasonable genius of it. It is about loving those you hate and would happily imprison or execute. It is about knowing that they are your brothers and you are not at all unlike them, with murderous splinters in your own heart. It is about being honest, or at least trying to be.

Listen: it is terribly, daily, hourly, immensely difficult for me to believe that there was a shred of decency in the man who murdered my friends Tommy Crotty, Farrell Lynch and Sean Lynch. It is close to impossible—and some days it is impossible for me. But I am damn well going to try, because I don't think Mr. Jesus Christ was a liar, and I think what he said is the only thing that can save the world, and us, and my beloved children, and yours. Amen.

CC

The coil of prayer

Count on the faith that links us
as we pray, about odd things
in each other's lives, nothing ruinous
—a lost ring, an aching tooth. Even
a request that we forget after
a casual pledge: *I'll be sure to pray for you*,
words spoken as we chat at the store
—they form a filament of gold, forged
in heaven, that loops around us.
Even careless phrases spoken through
air hold firm, are heard, and may
be answered. A cough that won't
give up, a missing check, a migraine
that suspends us, waiting, held
in the loop of prayer.

Luci Shaw

Brian Doyle is the editor of Portland Magazine at the University of Portland. His most recent collection of spiritual essays is *The Thorny Grace of It* (Loyola).

Dislocated

by Suzanne Guthrie

I NEED TO acknowledge right from the start that I'm moving from one great situation to another great situation. After six years living with Episcopal nuns on an organic farm, my husband and I find that we need to slow down a bit and give more space to the young people who come here to work and pray on the farm. Bill has been the farm's handyman—a relentless job in this complex of old buildings and new gardens. I've served as the community's priest, flower gardener and intern director. We will miss this gorgeous life of liturgy, laughter and close observation of nature with passionate people committed to the environment.

As boxes are packed, feelings erupt like zombies from the grave.

Now we're moving to our own home in Woodstock, New York, near many old friends. The house is a bit of a fixer-upper to keep Bill happy for a long time; for me, it means a landscape tabula rasa. I will continue teaching and writing. It's a great move.

So why the interior drama? Why demons and zombies? How do I pull out of a downward spiral of selfishness?

With the contents of the house turned inside out, my interior life takes a cue and turns inside out. Old demons slither out from under the bookcases: *You buried your talents in the ground. You've built the house of your life on shifting sands. See this STUFF? Do not lay up treasures where moths destroy and rust consumes. The wind bloweth where it listeth, baby. Clinging to your*

life, you lose it. Now's your chance to really do something useful for humanity! I'm demurring, obviously. The demons use specific barbs to catch my conscience, weakness by weakness. Fortunately, over the years and with lots of professional help, I've come to know these guys.

The good thing about the demons coming out of hiding is that they are coming out of hiding. Not for the comfort of their presence, because, of course, there's something delicious about the familiarly negative that attracts—like moving your tongue to the bloody cave left beneath a pulled tooth. It's necessary to know that the

barbs still catch and that more inner work needs to be done.

Old feelings erupt like zombies out of the graves where they've lain buried after other moves and traumas. One move was during a divorce that separated me by an ocean from two of my children. One time a moving company lost a crate that contained six generations of family photos and five boxes of unrecoverable research and writing for a book. One move was animated by anger, another was motivated by fear.

Then there are feelings that were hiding and found while packing; I came across a hastily stashed cache of treasures and books that I'd been saving for my grandchildren—a boy and girl who died a few hours after they were born last summer.

Feelings are a great inconvenience when there is so much to do.

And then there's stuff itself. Things accumulate to fill empty space, so that if you are moving from a big space to a small space, extra things will complicate the logistics of moving. It's like anxiety. Anxiety fills space proportionally, no matter how big or small.

I allow too much space for anxiety. And too much stuff. My youngest son reminds me, "Jesus said to the rich young man, 'Sell all you have and give your money to the poor and come, follow me.'" He doesn't say this in a mean way. We're in the midst of talking about Syria, Somalia and perspective. "Yeah, yeah," I say. "But I'm taking the Mission style furniture with me. Visitors to my Bible studies might as well sit on faux Stickley as broken folding chairs."

My son is right about perspective, though. Over a million Syrian refugees cling to borders of neighboring countries at this moment. The famine toll in Somalia for one year was 260,000, and over half of those were children under six years old. Over 3,000 peacekeepers have died serving in Somalia. Most people in the world bear images of horrors that are inconceivable to most Americans.

I don't keep Syria, Somalia and other places in mind to make me feel guilty. Aside from being a part of daily prayer, using my imagination and intellect to connect to unimaginable and

Suzanne Guthrie writes Soulwork Toward Sunday, a weekly self-guided retreat and meditation based on the lectionary's upcoming gospel reading, at edgeofenclosure.org. She lives in Woodstock, New York.

unthinkable suffering quickens my humanity. If I'm feeling dislocated living rather comfortably among boxes full of nice things, I can surely redirect my excess of feeling toward a refugee seeking sources of food for her child. She teaches me to examine the anxiety filling up all my empty space. There's danger in that half a thought, however. Am I creating some Somali woman as

an imaginary friend to benefit my growing in empathy? There's something solipsistic about this—as if the world's suffering is there to increase my human potential.

What can I do with the excess of feeling pouring into the liminal space opened by a move? Something practical, surely, however small. To begin with, I think I'll call a friend who works for the

International Red Cross. If she's not on the border of Syria right now, and if I can reach her, I'll see how she's doing and tell her I appreciate her work and am praying for her and for the people she serves. And then I'll resolve to do the best work I can in my new life, trusting that God will reckon as righteous my faithfulness to the relatively comfortable vocation of writing and teaching. **CC**

A visit to death row

Shocked by grace

by Matt Fitzgerald

MUCH OF THE STORY is hard to recall, but certain details are engraved in my memory, stamped right into me. I was a new pastor interested in writing, so when a magazine asked for an interview of a death row inmate, I jumped at the chance. I was asked to visit an Ohio prisoner named David Steffen. In the 1970s David had been convicted of brutally murdering a teenaged girl. Twenty-one years later, at the time of my visit, he was still awaiting execution.

I had never been in a prison before. It was raining, and guards drove me through the empty, gloomy yard on a golf cart. I was frightened. It was a barren place. The loops in the concertina wire looked vicious. One guard drank a can of Mountain Dew as we drove. She didn't speak, just stared at me malevolently. When we arrived on death row I walked through several gates and checkpoints before meeting with David in a classic government room with fluorescent lights and gray plastic furniture. Death row looked more like the DMV than a dungeon and was all the more menacing as a result.

The killer looked younger than his age. His skin was smooth, and he wore

his brown hair short. His face was framed by a pair of thick, heavy glasses, the kind hipsters wear. We sat across from each other at a small table. As we spoke he kept his eyes on my hands—ready, it seemed, to react defensively if I picked up my pen or reached for a bottle of water. But aside from this wariness he was remarkably peaceful for a man living under such intense pressure.

church talk became unwieldy, uncontrollable. The ease with which David spoke the spiritual language bothered me and pushed hard against my faith. All those years ago I was sure that I knew who deserved unmerited mercy—and I was not certain that David deserved it. So I pushed back.

I scolded him with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's caution about cheap grace:

When a murderer spoke of God's love, I felt threatened.

I was there to ask him about God. I noticed right away that every time God's name was mentioned, David referred to God's mercy; he spoke of "God's mercy" over and over again in a sort of litany. Each time the words *grace* or *mercy* were mentioned he prefaced them with adjectives familiar to any Protestant: "unmerited," "freely given," "undeserved."

Bandyng sacred language back and forth with a murderer unnerved me. I loved doing this with members of my congregation. But there in the prison,

"Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance. . . . Cheap grace is without discipleship, without the cross, without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate." Then I asked him if the weight of his sin had perhaps caused him to seize upon God's love too easily. Had he grabbed for mercy before truly reckoning with the horror of his crime?

I was about to learn that a young pastor didn't need to chasten a murderer who'd had 21 years to ponder these

things. He knew all about cheap grace. He had found the concept organically through years of reflection and had wrestled with it, walked right through it and come out the other side. Here's what he said to me:

The gospel requires us not simply to be sorry, but to be transformed by our sorrow. For me, this is a daily transformation. I'll never forget my crime. It is always deeply, deeply disturbing to me. But there has to come a point where you receive forgiveness and then forgive yourself—not in order to justify your actions, but in order to accept God's love.

Then he told me a story, gesturing with his hands so that the chains tying them together clanked and rattled in accompaniment. Outside his cell, said David, there are two fences, each about 20 feet high and covered with roll after roll of barbed wire. The space between the fences is empty, a no-man's land designed to strand escapees.

A rabbit lives between the fences, David said, and he watches it every morning. "The rabbit has no sense of where it is. It doesn't know it's living out its life in a maximum security prison. It eats clover and dandelions and wakes up early. It has no sense of being restricted by all these fences. It's the same for me. I'm in prison, but I'm not letting myself be restricted simply because I'm wearing shackles and handcuffs. I'm a person, and I'm a person who is loved and forgiven by God."

I was shocked. In front of me was a man who had brutally killed a teenager; in front of me was a man who is loved by God. I was so startled that I jumped back from the table and stalked out of the room.

This man had claimed the love of God as his own. He had claimed what I preached. And yet when the evidence was in front of me, I could not believe it. I'd spent a lot of energy trying to *contain* God's presence. I had carefully learned rituals and chosen music and crafted sermon sentences that aimed to cultivate grace.

What I had either forgotten or never

learned is that right next to all of this is something that's out of control: *the power of God*. It's a surging and crackling energy, a wildness that the church hints at but doesn't own. When I felt it come alive in that prison it made me jump because it defied a deeply ingrained, childish belief in justice and decency. How could a murderer grab hold of the same love I'd been given?

Sitting there with David, I'd felt the pressure of a greater reality pushing against the neat division in my heart between those who are unworthy of God's love and those who are worthy. David Steffen had been forgiven. He'd claimed the love of God as his own, and that claim threatened me. I never would have guessed that the most unnerving thing I would encounter on death row was the grace of God.

When I walked back through the prison yard the rain had let up, and the guard who had maintained a steely silence on our way in was now pleasant and talkative. Dogs were playing in the prison yard, chasing tennis balls thrown by inmates. The guard explained that these dogs had been removed from abusive homes and were

being trained by prisoners before returning to the world. I fought back tears. Suddenly everything seemed brighter.

Instead of leaving David behind, it seemed as if he had come with me. Or at least the fact of his salvation had. Or perhaps the One who had accomplished it walked nearer now.

Today I still think about David, and about how I stepped onto death row with my heart in my throat, anticipating the worst but found a broken sinner redeemed and pieced back together by the love of God. I anticipated meeting a monster and found grace instead.

Occasionally, someone will tell me that he or she does not believe in God or is struggling to have faith; I am never sure what to say. Usually I mumble the typical liberal Protestant pieties: Paul Tillich says that "doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is one element of faith," and so on. But sometimes I tell them David's story, about how I once saw the results of a miracle. Water into wine? How about a man transformed? Which is to say that the one inquiring is right: God is hard to believe in. Not because God is vague or elusive or contradicts the claims of science, but because God can be so obvious, so dangerous, so free. CC

of all the Woulds

My Son could
have ridden and shed blood upon

mahogany, ebony,
maple, elm, oak,
fir, poplar, banyan, teak,
palm, bamboo, juniper, sequoia,

hawthorn, dogwood, magnolia, crab,
evergreen, balsa, birch, ficus,
peach, cherry, pear, persimmon, or

apple

the most common one
He'd allow
for
Himself to be spread-eagled on

would be yew.

Carl Windler

Matt Fitzgerald is pastor of Saint Paul's United Church of Christ in Chicago.

Rift grows for United Methodists

A deep divide within the United Methodist Church over how to minister to gays and lesbians has led a Washington, D.C., pastor to suggest the denomination should not wait until its 2016 General Conference to change its policies.

Bishops could call a special General Conference to address the policies that are splitting the church, said Dean Snyder, senior pastor of Foundry United Methodist Church, a large and prestigious church near Dupont Circle.

"Some of us believe this issue is critical enough to do that," Snyder said in a telephone interview. "There's more and more pressure from one side to enforce the rules and more and more pressure from the other side that thinks the rules are unjust and unloving."

On Sunday, December 22, Snyder's church welcomed Frank Schaefer, a former Lebanon, Pennsylvania, United Methodist minister, to his Washington congregation. Schaefer was found guilty in November of violating church law for performing a 2007 same-sex wedding of his son to another man. When he said he would refuse to quit performing same-sex weddings, church officials in Pennsylvania stripped him of his clergy credentials.

At least four more clergy trials are possible in the near future for other Methodist pastors who have officiated at same-sex marriages.

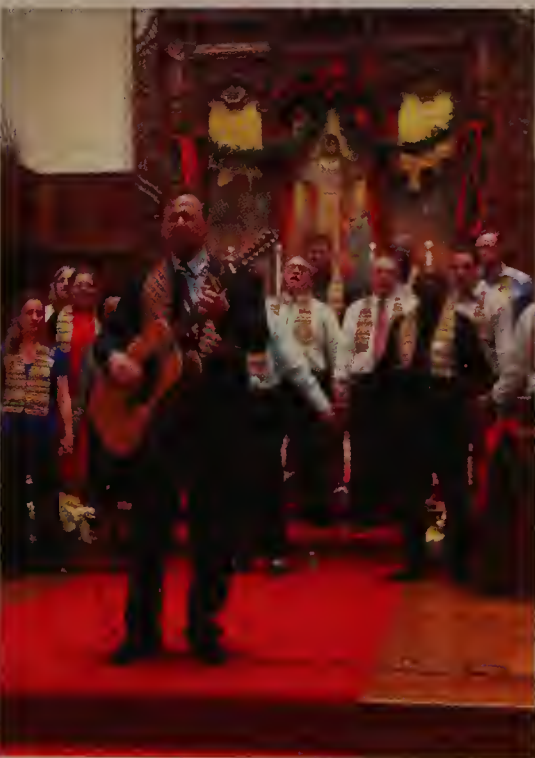
Snyder, who has performed as many as a dozen same-sex weddings but has not been prosecuted by the church, does not oppose using trials to enforce the church's rulebook, the Book of Discipline.

"But these trials are about enforcing obedience to just some of the rules of the church," he said. "That draconian effort to force obedience to selected rules leaves a bad taste in people's mouths.

Trials are counterproductive, and we have to find other ways to negotiate our differences."

The denomination accepts gay and lesbian members, but its Book of Discipline calls the practice of homosexuality "incompatible with Christian teaching" and bars clergy from performing same-sex unions.

Since he was defrocked, Schaefer has received an outpouring of support. Foundry invited him to join as a member, and he gave the sermon on the Sunday before Christmas. Reading Matt. 1:18-25, he cited Joseph as a model of love who was unwilling to subject Mary to public disgrace.



SINGING OUT: Frank Schaefer, a Pennsylvania pastor who lost his clergy status November 19 for officiating at his son's same-sex marriage, joined Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington, D.C., where he preached and led the singing of "We Shall Overcome" at a December 22 service.

In another sign of the growing rift, Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño, based in Southern California, invited Schaefer on December 20 to join the church's California-Pacific Conference. While noting that only a board of ordained ministry could reinstate his credentials, Carcaño said, "We should stand with him and others who show such courage and faithfulness."

Also on December 20, Bishop John Schol of the Greater New Jersey Conference released a tearful video statement in which he called on the church to stop using church trials to decide questions of faith and told gays and lesbians many people in the church support them.

"You are children of God, of sacred worth," Schol said. "There are United Methodist churches that open their doors wide to you and are ready to be in ministry with you and treat you just like every other member of their church."

At Foundry Church, Schaefer told the congregation that he had received hundreds of e-mails, most of them supportive, according to the United Methodist News Service. He urged Methodists threatening to quit the denomination to stay: "We need you in our fight."

Activists for LGBT marital rights admit that theirs has been a losing battle in the UMC. Every four years when the global UMC holds its World Conference, an increasing ratio of delegates from Africa, Asia and South America block any steps to accept same-sex marriage.

Schaefer, in that vein, put it bluntly—the United Methodist Church has been in "homophobic captivity" for more than 40 years. Yet asked by a reporter if the fight will lead to a split in the church, Schaefer replied, "I think we're already split. . . . Something has to change, something has to give." —Renee K. Gadoua, RNS/added sources

Black-white racial divide is worse, researchers say

Nearly 60 years after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned a “separate but equal” doctrine that reinforced segregation, almost a quarter of Americans say it is OK for races to be separate as long as they have equal opportunities.

Half a century after Martin Luther King Jr. dreamed of carving out “a stone of hope” from the mountain of despair in race relations, black Americans are five times as likely as white Americans to think about their race every day and more than three times as likely to report being treated unfairly because of the color of their skin.

As the world commemorates the

passing of Nelson Mandela, a man who forced his country to confront apartheid and led South Africa through a peaceful transition to a multiracial democracy, more than half of Americans, including six in ten whites, say one of the best ways to improve race relations is to stop talking about race.

The new findings from the second wave of a major study on religion and race lay bare the dramatic and growing gap in racial attitudes and experiences in America.

The United States is not a postracial nation, the 2012 Portraits of American Life Study suggests, but a land of two Americas divided by race and less willing than ever to find a common ground of understanding.

The Portraits of American Life Study is a massive effort involving thousands of

face-to-face interviews exploring more than 600 aspects of religious life, with a particular focus on ethnic and religious diversity. The study received funding from Lilly Endowment, Rice University and the University of Notre Dame.

The 2006 study was led by sociologists Michael Emerson of Rice and David Sikkink of Notre Dame. Emerson, codirector of the Kinder Institute for Urban Research at Rice, also led the 2012 study, which drew responses from a random sample of 1,314 U.S. adults who participated in the first study.

The 2006 study showed a vast gap in perspectives on race among black and white Americans. In many key indicators, however, the gap increased by 2012.

Among the findings:

- **Importance of race:** In 2006, about four in ten blacks said they were aware

Respect for clergy drops, according to Gallup poll

CLERGY USED TO rank near the top in polls where Americans were asked to rate the honesty and ethics of people in various professions. This year, for the first time since Gallup began asking the question in 1977, fewer than half of those polled said clergy have “high” or “very high” moral standards.

But opinions on clergy differed markedly by party, with Republicans viewing them far more favorably than Democrats.

Overall, 47 percent of respondents to the survey gave clergy “high” or “very high” ratings, a sharp drop in confidence from the 67 percent of Americans who viewed them this way in 1985.

Among Republicans, 63 percent gave clergy one of the two top ratings for ethics, compared with 40 percent of Democrats.

In an article accompanying the poll, Gallup senior editor Jeffrey M. Jones wrote that Republicans might think more highly of clergy, police and military officers “because those people work in traditional institutions in American society, which Republicans may hold in greater esteem because of their generally conservative ideology.”

“Greater religiosity among Republicans than among Democrats also factors into Republicans’ higher ratings of clergy,” Jones added.

Young people age 29–34 tend to rate professionals more highly than those 55 and older, but the pattern does not hold for clergy. Less than one in three young people (32 percent) give clergy high moral marks, compared with 50 percent of those 55 and older.

This may be because young people tend to be less religious than older people, Jones writes.

In 2012, clergy took a backseat to nurses, pharmacists, schoolteachers, medical doctors, military and police officers.

Nurses are the most trusted and have been nearly every year since Gallup added them to the poll in 1999, with 82 percent of people saying they rank high or very high on the ethical spectrum. Clergy came in seventh of the 22 professions ranked.

The overall trend for clergy has sloped downward since 2001, with Gallup pollsters attributing the slide to scandals involving the sexual abuse of minors.

“The Catholic priest abuse stories from the early 2000s helped lead to a sharp drop in Americans’ ratings of clergy, a decline from which the profession has yet to fully recover,” Gallup managing editor Art Swift wrote about the poll.

But J. C. Austin of Auburn Theological Seminary suggests another reason the clergy’s reputation has suffered. Too often, he said, divisive clergy overshadow those working toward the common good.

“We saw that this year, in particular, around the marriage equality debates when voices of faith were represented as the opposition even though countless people of faith fought for marriage equality precisely because their faith compelled them to do so,” he said.

Though clergy seem to be dropping in the nation’s esteem, they are far from the bottom of the list. Reading from the bottom up, the poll ranks lobbyists, members of Congress, car salespeople, state office holders and advertising practitioners as the least ethical.

The poll of 1,031 Americans was conducted December 5–8 and has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points. —Lauren Markoe, RNS

of what race they were every day. In 2012, nearly half of blacks, including 52 percent of black Protestants, said they thought about their race daily. Just 10 percent of whites in both studies reported the same degree of racial awareness.

• **Role of government:** In 2006, slightly more than a third of white respondents, including 42 percent of white mainline Protestants, said the government should do more to help minorities increase their standard of living. In 2012, just a quarter of white respondents, and only 21 percent of white mainline Protestants, favored such government action. In the same period, the percentage of black respondents favoring a greater role for government rose from 71 percent in 2006 to 79 percent in 2012.

• **Racial prejudice:** Perceived racial injustice rose for both whites and blacks. The percentage of whites who said they had been treated unfairly because of their race in the last three years rose from 8 percent in 2006 to 14 percent in 2012. The percentage of blacks reporting prejudice rose from 36 percent in 2006 to 46 percent in 2012.

Given these increasing racial gaps, the apparent growing indifference to efforts for integration or reconciliation may be of particular concern.

For example in 2006, 15 percent of white respondents and 21 percent of black respondents agreed with the statement, “It’s OK to have a country where the races are basically separate from one another, as long as they have equal opportunity.” In 2012, 24 percent of white respondents and 27 percent of black respondents backed such a separate but equal approach.

A great deal of research has suggested that increased understanding and contact among people of different groups reduces prejudice and increases civility.

In a campaign speech in 2008, then Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama lifted up the different experiences and perspectives of black and white Americans. They are part, Obama said, of “the complexities of race in this country that we’ve never really worked through—a part of our union that we have not yet made perfect.”

A national dialogue on race is necessary, he said. “If we walk away now, if we

simply retreat into our respective corners, we will never be able to come together and solve challenges like health care or education or the need to find good jobs for every American.”

Five years into the tenure of the first African-American president, however, America is further away from having that type of conversation, the Portraits of American Life Study indicates.

Forty-five percent of white respondents in 2006 said one of the most effective ways to improve race relations was to stop talking about race. In 2012, 59 percent wanted to stop talking about race, including 69 percent of white evangelical Protestants and 65 percent of white Catholics.

The percentage of black respondents favoring less talk about race rose from 31 percent in 2006 to 39 percent in 2012, including 44 percent of black Protestants. —David Briggs, thearda.com

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Conviction reversed in case of clergy abuse cover-up

A post-Christmas court decision that freed a senior Catholic cleric in Philadelphia who had been jailed for shielding an abusive priest was a symbolic setback for victims’ advocates and one with a substantial and discouraging message for their cause: none of the churchmen implicated in cover-ups during the worst decades of abuse is likely ever to face charges.

The June 2012 conviction of Monsignor William Lynn was seen as a landmark verdict because until then no one in the upper levels of the Catholic Church had ever faced a trial or been found guilty of shielding molesters. Lynn, who oversaw clergy and fielded abuse complaints for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia from 1992 to 2004, was sentenced to three to six years on one count of child endangerment.

But Lynn was expected to be released soon from prison after serving 18 months. An appellate panel threw out his conviction.

During the past few decades, a number of abusers have been convicted and many defrocked. But public outrage was largely directed against the bishops and senior church officials like Lynn, who, as the appeals court noted in its ruling December 26, “prioritized the archdiocese’s reputation over the safety of potential victims of sexually abusive priests.”

But the appeals ruling also said that Lynn’s behavior, while outrageous to much of the Catholic faithful and the wider public, did not violate the child welfare law in place at the time of the abuse.

And therein lies the harsh reality of the clergy abuse scandal: much like the financial scandals that rocked the nation after the recession of 2007, almost no one at the highest echelons of responsibility was ever brought to trial or even charged with a crime.

“Literally thousands of U.S. Catholic officials have done precisely what Monsignor Lynn did and were never even charged or exposed, much less convicted,” said David Clohessy, executive director of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, or SNAP. “And we believe that hundreds or thousands of chancery officials across the globe are doing—right now—exactly what Monsignor Lynn did for years.”

A chief reason that the American hierarchy escaped prosecution was simple: the offenses that came to light largely took place years earlier, and if the statute of limitations on those crimes had not run out, many of the bishops and cardinals responsible for protecting the abusers had themselves expired.

Another cruel irony is that the revelations often led to tougher laws and reforms that extended the statute of limitations on reporting abuse, but these measures came too late to snare the churchmen responsible for the offenses that prompted those reforms.

The Lynn case was a microcosm of the conundrum. Pennsylvania’s child welfare law was amended in 2007 in the wake of abuse reports to explicitly include supervisors like Lynn. But that was after Lynn had retired, and it was not retroactive.

Moreover, the conviction of Lynn was always something of a consolation prize.

Lynn's boss, Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua, who headed the archdiocese from 1988 to 2003, was found by a grand jury to have orchestrated policies that ignored victims and shielded hundreds of abusive clergy from punishment. But the laws at the time were too weak to bring Bevilacqua up on charges, and he died in January 2012 before the start of Lynn's trial, where he was expected to be a star witness.

In a similar fashion, disgraced Cardinal Bernard Law of Boston also escaped charges despite his role in a series of cover-ups. After months as the target of public anger, Pope John Paul II gave Law a post in Rome, where he has lived quietly and out of the spotlight.

Even Cardinal Roger Mahony, who was just 49 when he was named archbishop of Los Angeles in 1985, was never charged with a crime despite thousands of pages of internal documents released in recent years that detailed how he shuffled priests around to protect them. Mahony is 77 and retired in 2011.

So, what now? In Philadelphia, District Attorney Seth Williams said he would probably appeal the Lynn ruling. Some church observers say that whatever happens, the Lynn case put church officials across the country on notice that they have to report crimes. "Law enforcement officials, if they have the courage, can often find creative ways to charge and convict corrupt clerics," Clohessy said.

Clohessy and others noted that three months after Lynn's conviction, Bishop Robert W. Finn of Missouri was sentenced to two years of court-supervised probation for failing to report suspected child abuse by a priest who was later convicted on federal child pornography charges. The crime in that instance took place in 2010 and was a rare example of a case authorities could readily prosecute.

Victims' advocates are also encouraged that the Catholic scandal continues to prompt reforms in abuse laws and prevention policies and that those who were abused are more likely than ever to come forward with their stories.

But increasingly the focus of hope is shifting to the Vatican, where advocates say Pope Francis needs to ensure that a new commission on child abuse estab-

lishes a level of church penalties for bishops that they never faced in the secular sphere. Finn, victims' advocates note, remains in office, and archbishops in Minnesota and New Jersey have not been removed despite new revelations about their roles in protecting abusive priests.

"It's good that Finn and Lynn were convicted, but the value of those two cases was always symbolic—they showed a kind of accountability that was never going to be as broad as it should be," said Terence McKiernan, head of BishopAccountability.org, a watchdog group.

Nicholas Cafardi, a canon and civil lawyer at the Duquesne Law School in Pittsburgh and former head of the Catholic bishops' national review board on clergy abuse, said Francis must broaden the mandate of the commission to include his brother bishops.

"We have to insist that there be repercussions for any bishop who would reassign or cover up for a sexually abusive priest," Cafardi wrote in an e-mail. "The church will never have closure on this issue unless the larger problem of hierarchical complicity is dealt with." —David Gibson, RNS

Same-sex marriages rose rapidly last year

By mid-December 2013, gay and lesbian couples could count eight states that had approved same-sex marriages through court rulings or legislative action that year.

Then two western states joined the group, bringing the national total to 18 states (including the District of Columbia) offering "marriage equality":

- On December 19, the New Mexico Supreme Court ruled that the state may not curtail the freedom of same-sex couples to wed. The justices had been asked for a statewide ruling because eight New Mexico counties had recently started issuing marriage certificates to same-sex couples; the state never had a law banning gay or lesbian marriages.

- On December 20, in Utah, where voters approved a constitutional amendment in 2004 prohibiting same-sex marriage, federal judge Robert J. Shelby overturned the ban, ruling that the law violated gay and lesbian couples' rights under the 14th Amendment.

Shelby said the state failed to show



UTAH WEDDINGS: Jax Collins (left) and Heather Collins are married by Christopher Scuderi of Universal Heart Ministry on December 23 at the Salt Lake City county offices. Hundreds of same-sex couples descended on county clerk offices across Utah to request marriage licenses. A federal judge in Utah had struck down the state's ban on same-sex marriage three days earlier.

RNS / FRANCISCO KJOLSETH / SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

that allowing same-sex marriages would affect opposite-sex marriages in any way.

Shelby's ruling mentioned the practice of the United Church of Christ, noting that churches have the religious freedom to decide what couples can be married in the church, and that the law does not impose any practices on churches that do not approve of marriage equality.

Reactions in Utah were swift. Salt Lake City mayor Ralph Becker, a Democrat, went to the county clerk's office on December 20 and helped to marry some three dozen same-sex couples. "It was a powerful, emotional day," Becker said.

But the decision drew an angry reaction from Republican Gov. Gary Herbert, who said he was disappointed in an "activist federal judge attempting to override the will of the people of Utah."

Utah planned an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court for a stay that would stop same-sex marriages, pending an

appeal of Shelby's ruling in the 10th U.S. Circuit. It was the state's fifth attempt since Shelby's ruling—Shelby himself denied Utah's request on December 23 and the appellate court refused Utah's motion for a third time the next day, after finding that the state did not stand a "significant likelihood of success" on appeal and was suffering no "irreparable harm" by allowing the marriages.

Shelby has been on the bench for less than two years, appointed by President Barack Obama after GOP Sen. Orrin Hatch recommended him in November 2011.

"Judge Shelby's ruling is a powerful reminder that marriage equality does not threaten anyone's religious freedom—but expands freedom for the growing number of congregations that support and bless the marriages of all of their members," said Andy Lang, executive director of the United Church of Christ's Coalition for LGBT Concerns.

The decision is seen as a major shift, since Utah is considered a conservative state and home to the Mormon church, which has long been against same-sex marriage.

National polls, however, showed steady shifts in public opinion and even LDS church leaders urged that members be respectful of gays and lesbians as people even as they oppose same-sex intimacy.

In late June 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the federal Defense of Marriage Act was unconstitutional because it discriminated against same-sex couples who were legally married. The justices also struck down a California law that prohibited gay marriage, restoring equality to that state.

Three more states in the fall—New Jersey, Hawaii and Illinois—were added to the list before New Mexico and Utah came aboard in December.

In 2014, there are potential legal and legislative battles in Oregon, Colorado, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Ohio.

A federal judge in Cincinnati ruled on December 23 that Ohio officials must recognize gay marriages on death certificates, reported Associated Press. Judge Timothy Black said the state's ban on such unions is unconstitutional. Ohio's attorney general said the state will appeal the decision. —USA Today/added sources

Nod to unbelievers part of pope's style

When Pope Francis left his script Christmas morning to ad-lib an invitation to atheists to join the prayerful in "desiring peace," it may have been the first time an *Urbi et Orbi* Christmas address—an annual message "to the city and the world"—mentioned unbelievers.

The improvised remark was a surprise to many in the media, but not to veteran pope watchers who have heard Francis reach out to atheists before. Historian and *Catholic Almanac* editor Matthew Bunson noted several examples:

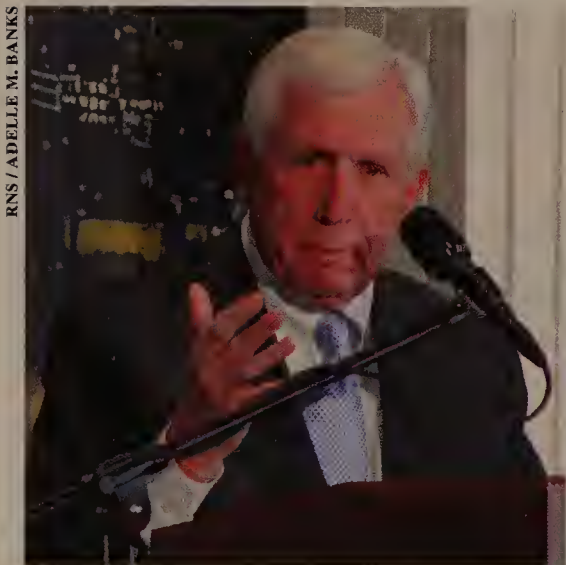
- Shortly after Francis's inaugural mass in March, meeting with representatives of Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders, he referred to those who belong to no religious tradition as "precious allies" in defending the dignity of man, working for peace and protecting creation.

- In a homily in May, he said Jesus redeemed "all of us, not just Catholics . . . even the atheists. Everyone! . . . We must meet one another doing good." Theologically, this was a meeting on earth, not in heaven. Redemption is not the same as salvation in Catholic teaching. But meeting with anyone willing to work for the common good is a frequent Francis theme.

- In September, the pope invited himself to a conversation with Eugenio Scalfari, an atheist and well-known editor of the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*. Since there was no recording of the interview, the transcript is in question, but there's no doubt he felt at home discussing theology with an unbeliever.

"The only thing that would surprise us about Pope Francis is if he didn't surprise us," said James Martin, culture editor of *America* magazine.

"He realizes that atheists and agnostics are people of good intentions and good morals with whom we want to work closely," said Martin. "Jesus came into a world filled with believers and unbelievers and the pope lives in that same world." —Cathy Lynn Grossman, RNS



RNS/ADELE M. BANKS

RETIRING AFTER 33 YEARS: Rep. Frank Wolf, one of the loudest and most persistent voices in Congress for the right of people around the globe to practice their faith freely, will not seek an 18th term. The Republican from northern Virginia, who turns 75 in January, is a Presbyterian, and he said on December 17 that he will work on human rights, religious freedom and other social issues in his retirement. Nina Shea, an international human rights lawyer with the Hudson Institute, said, "The cause of religious freedom has no better friend in Congress than Frank Wolf and his stepping down will leave a gaping vacuum."

Children's right to die affirmed in Belgium

A long-running debate over a child's right to die is coming to a head after the passage of a bill by Belgium's upper house of parliament agreeing to extend the country's euthanasia law to children.

Belgian senators voted 50-17 in favor of the bill in early December. If adopted by the lower house, the measure will make Belgium the first country to allow euthanasia for children who are terminally ill and living with "constant and unbearable physical suffering." The child would have to submit a written request for the procedure, have a "capacity for discernment" and obtain consent from his or her parents.

Conservative lawmakers said they feared the legislation could be abused and argued that it would be difficult to determine whether a child is sufficiently able to make such a decision alone.

Christian, Muslim and Jewish religious leaders in Belgium condemned the bill as trivializing death and setting society on a dangerous path.

"In the actual proposal of the law, it says that only capable minors can decide on euthanasia—but there is no instrument to measure this capability," said lawmaker Els Van Hoof of the Christian Democratic and Flemish Party.

Van Hoof added that children are treated in criminal and civil law as incapable of making certain informed decisions. They do not vote and are not subject to the same punishments as adults for breaking the law, she pointed out.

But supporters of the legislation said children in such situations are mature enough to make decisions. They added that a psychologist would evaluate the child's capacity for decision making.

"There is an independent commission which is competent to evaluate cases of euthanasia in our country," said Philippe Mahoux, a Socialist Party senator and the bill's main sponsor. "For ten years, the commission had no abuses reported."

Still, Charles Foster, a British lawyer who specializes in medicine, said it was difficult to establish even in adults whether the person making the euthana-

sia request was fully informed and free from influence. The area is "difficult to police" and was one of the issues raised during parliamentary debates on assisted suicide legislation in England, he said.

Belgium passed legislation legalizing euthanasia in 2002 and in 2012. The mainly secular country, which has a strong Roman Catholic tradition, is one of a few European countries to allow some form of assisted dying.

Euthanasia for adults is permitted in Luxembourg and in special cases for terminally ill patients ages 12 or older in the Netherlands. Switzerland has allowed assisted suicide by doctors since the 1940s, offering the service in clinics such as Dignitas. Still, euthanasia remains illegal there.

Under Belgian law, parents of terminally ill children can opt for palliative sedation, in which high doses of sedatives are prescribed at the end of the

patient's life. Food and liquids are then withdrawn to speed up death, which normally occurs within hours or days.

Van Hoof said the palliative alternatives and treatment options available are sufficient to relieve the physical suffering of terminally ill children.

But Mahoux disagreed. "Palliative care sometimes isn't sufficient," he said. "When the cancer is in the final phase, when no remission is possible, some minors suffer too much and ask for euthanasia."

Foster, who holds a doctorate in bioethics, said he was "concerned that the legislation will have a corrosive effect on the medical profession. If you turn a profession of healers into a profession of executioners, that's going to change the nature of the profession and the nature of the people who go into the profession," he said. —Jennifer Collins and Sumi Somskada, RNS

Ugandan law would give gays life imprisonment

A UGANDAN CLERIC who ministers to homosexuals has criticized the passage of a controversial law that imposes life imprisonment for homosexual acts.

Christopher Ssenyonjo, the former Anglican Bishop of West Buganda, said gay men have done nothing wrong and should not be punished.

He spoke in a telephone interview December 20, hours after legislators passed the law known as the Anti-Homosexuality Bill, 2009. President Yoweri Museveni must sign the bill within 30 days for it to become law.

"People here don't understand what homosexuality is," Ssenyonjo said. "If they did, I don't think they would have allowed this law."

Ssenyonjo was defrocked 2002 for his ministry to gay men. According to the cleric, homosexuality is not a sin, but actions against it were being justified through scriptures and culture. "I think people need education on the issue," said Ssenyonjo.

The bill was first proposed in 2009 but had been shelved due to international pressure. President Barack Obama described the bill as "odious." It initially proposed death sentences for certain homosexual acts in cases where one of the sexual partners is a minor or is infected with the HIV virus that causes AIDS.

Homosexuality is illegal in 38 African countries according to a June report by the human rights group Amnesty International. In South Africa, same-sex marriage has been legal for years, and citizens of all sexual orientations have rights guaranteed by the constitution, yet seven people were killed in antigay violence in the that nation in 2012, the Amnesty International report said.

In 2012, Rebecca Kadaga, the Speaker of Uganda's parliament, promised the law to Ugandans as a Christmas gift. The current bill passed would penalize people who are aware of homosexual activity but fail to report it. —RNS/added sources

LIVING BY The Word

Sunday, January 26

Isaiah 9:1–4

THE PEOPLE WHO walked in darkness have seen a great light.” Everyone who has ever sat through a performance of the *Messiah* knows what’s next: “For unto us a child is born . . .” Handel’s exuberant chorus is probably playing in your mind right now: “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace . . .” Isaiah’s royal birth announcement, bright with possibility and expectation, is the centerpiece of the Old Testament lection for Christmas Eve. So it seems strange that the lectionary chooses to reprise it four weeks downstream from Christmas during the January doldrums. Stranger still, the reprise is aborted: we get only the introduction of the theme without its resolution in the announcement of the birth it is meant to herald.

The language of Isaiah 9:1–4 is elusive. It starts in prose, but most translations convert to poetry in verse two, following the editors of most Hebrew texts. There is imagery of despair—gloom, darkness and deep darkness—before the passage begins its turn toward the light. There are place names, mostly lost in the mists of history—Zebulun, Naphtali, “the way of the sea” and “Galilee of the nations”—places of contempt that may yet cherish the hope of recovery. There are the oblique references to vassalage and servitude: the bar across the shoulders, the rod of the oppressor. And if you push on one verse further than the lection, there is the detritus of war: “the boot of the tramping warrior,” “the garment rolled in blood.” Reading these words is like arising in the morning after a violent storm; you look out the window at a yard where turbulent and chaotic forces wreaked havoc during the night. You feel relieved and grateful to have survived, yet somehow drained.

Scholars say the historical context of these verses is the aftermath of the Aramaean-Israelite war. In the mid-730s BCE, a coalition of forces from Aram (Syria) and the northern Israelite kingdom invaded Judah, bent on tearing King Ahaz from his throne and replacing him with a puppet king. The invading forces crossed into the Transjordan. The plan was to form a united wall of resistance to the advance of the Assyrian army, which was moving steadily south and west on its way to the Mediterranean and ultimately to Egypt. If the coalition could secure Judah in its rear, it could fight a single-front war against the mightier invader and perhaps preserve its political identity. But the Assyrians arrived early, and the coalition was caught with its northern frontier unprotected. Aram was crushed, Israel pacified, and Judah relieved and grateful to have survived.

So much for the geopolitics. But as anyone who has ever seen a war zone knows, geopolitics never tells the whole story of war. The real story is written in the rubble of ruined homes

and desecrated sanctuaries, looted stores and hopeless survivors. The real story is the story of lingering anguish, the story of those who wake to a silent morning after a night of terror, when relief begins slowly coagulating into despair.

Into this congealing despair the prophet speaks his word of hope: “There will be no gloom for those who were in anguish . . . The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.”

I wonder whether there is a basic similarity between our position in late January and that of the survivors of the Aramaean invasion. I don’t mean to suggest that we comfortable Westerners suffer the same deprivations as did those Judaeans—that would be to insult war’s victims all over again. But perhaps something of the survivor’s despair may creep over us as a cold winter darkens and the Christmas decorations go back into the attic, as we confront the fact that once again the birth of Christ has not appreciably improved the landscape of our reality.

Emily Dickinson’s poem “After great pain, a formal feeling comes—” was inspired by Good Friday, but it seems somehow appropriate to our post-Epiphany slog through Ordinary Time. Dickinson reflects on the strange frozenness that we experience after moments of highest passion:

After great pain, a formal feeling comes—
The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs—

And in the poem’s last verse:

This is the Hour of Lead—
Remembered, if outlived,
As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow—
First—Chill—then Stupor—then the letting go—

Into our situation, our “hour of lead,” the prophet speaks his reminder that great light illumines only what is in darkness. Hope has its greatest meaning when it comes to those on the point of letting go and losing hope altogether. Maybe that’s why the lectionary reminds us of Christmas in the dreariness of January. It is a way of saying that hope is an alternate reality that lives beneath despair and is never quite vanquished by it.

The more Christmases and Epiphanies I observe, the more I’m convinced that we live, individually and ecclesiastically, frozen on the edge between darkness and dawn, restrained by despair but reaching out for hope. We live on the strength of a promise not yet realized. The abiding sameness of the world never permits us to forget the darkness in which we live, even if only a month after the lights and music of Christmastide. But neither does it have the power to douse the hope that pools around the manger or sparkles in the angels’ song. The hope lives on, even in the hour of lead.

Reflections on the lectionary

Sunday, February 2
Micah 6:1–8

MY COLLEGE YEARS resonated with Micah's challenge to Judaeen society to "do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God." I heard this challenge on the lips of Martin Luther King Jr. and William Sloane Coffin, heroes of my adolescence. But the pinnacle of its power for me came in Jimmy Carter's 1977 inaugural address:

The passion for freedom is on the rise. Tapping this new spirit, there can be no nobler nor more ambitious task for America to undertake on this day of a new beginning than to help shape a just and peaceful world that is truly humane.

Carter's address buoyed my hopes for a better, more compassionate nation. But by the end of his term, the Bert Lance scandal and the hostage crisis in Tehran with its failed rescue mission had played out on *Nightline*. I was much less sanguine about the possibilities of that new beginning. I spent most of the next 12 years feeling the malaise Carter suggested we were facing. My idealism has never quite recovered. Perhaps that's why Micah's words always give me heartburn. They speak of exhausted hopes and dented expectations.

Still, I can't quite write them off. Reading them again in their larger context, I realize that I'm not the only one feeling acute disappointment; God seems less than pleased too. In the chapters that precede Micah 6, the prophet recites the divine complaint: false worship, injustice to the poor, dishonest rulers, unreliable prophets. These are the causes, claims the prophet, of the national calamity of invasion and exile, the loss of home and hope. Using the metaphor of a lawsuit against Judah, God appeals for judgment against the people:

O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me!

God goes on to cite the exodus from Egypt and the deliverance from the hands of the Moabite Balak as evidence of God's faithfulness. God has delivered on all the divine promises, and Judah has no grounds for defense.

Apparently God's case is convincing. Implicitly acknowledging its guilt, Judah pleads for terms in language that captures a rising sense of hysteria. What shall we sacrifice to please God—a yearling calf? A thousand sheep? Ten thou-

sand vessels of sacred oil? A firstborn child? What will appease an angry God?

In answer, the prophet defines the pathway to peace: justice, kindness and humility. They have a different sense now than when I heard them on Carter's lips. The words seem less a sweeping program for national transformation and more a short list of theological virtues for individuals and faith communities. What are faithful people to do in complex and anxious times? You already know, for God has told you. Go back to the basics. It's not that complicated.

Of course, that doesn't mean that living out these virtues is easy. Doing justice is hard because our visions of justice are too often diametrically opposed. The competitive visions that drive our society into polarized camps will never admit a justice that involves compromise. The kind of justice that the prophet speaks of is not justice imposed by courts or congresses, but justice that emerges from conversation. Justice, it turns out, is first cousin to reconciliation.

Loving-kindness is about more than being nice. As my seminary professors reminded us, *kindness* is *chesed* in Hebrew, a term that speaks of covenant and the mutual obligation of partners to one another. *Chesed* is about trust—trust that those with whom we are in covenant will honor our interests as we honor theirs. It is about the readiness to treat the well-being of the other as a higher value than the vindication of the self. Kindness entails vulnerability.

Walking humbly with God may be hardest of all, if for no other reason than that it involves humility. We don't do humility well because it involves admitting the possibility of error. I love the story of Oliver Cromwell, who, in a speech to the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland in 1650, begged Scottish Presbyterians to desist in their dalliance with King Charles II. "I beseech you, gentlemen, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken." These are ironic words from a dictator who was so sure of his own righteousness that he sanctioned the execution of King Charles I, but they are nevertheless words worth remembering.

In the church where I worship, the pastor occasionally uses these words as a charge before the benediction. They are said not as a political challenge or a program of social change but as a reminder of the real agenda for the faithful. I like them best in that context. I continue to hold the chastened hope that person to person, faith community to faith community, we might still take incremental steps toward what the prophet calls "good." For today, that's good enough.

The author is Paul K. Hooker, associate dean for ministerial formation and advanced studies at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

MENTORS

In response to our request for essays on mentors, we received many compelling reflections. The following is a selection.

What are you doing in here? Shouldn't you be out visiting patients? asked Gerry. Gerry was one member of the chaplaincy staff that ministry students tried to steer clear of. With his barely audible greetings and rolling of the eyes, he let us know we were on his turf and in the way.

"Um, yes. Just checking up on some patients on the computer database. Leaving now."

Which was a lie. The real reason I was in the office was because I was hiding. That morning's rounds on the surgical floor hadn't gone well. Two years of divinity school taught me about Heidegger and hermeneutics, but I hadn't discovered what I actually felt about God or how to talk to God.

Just then Gerry's pager went off. "Nathan, wait. Why don't you come with me." I followed him into the hallway and past the elevators. He said we were going to the emergency room, where a pregnant woman had just miscarried and wanted a blessing for the baby.

In the emergency room a nurse took us into a room and drew a curtain around us.

"Hold your hands like this," said Gerry, holding his hands outstretched over the blue blanket. "Just speak." I began to hear myself pray. Did I say God? Did I grow suddenly certain that this young life was bound for heaven? Did I ask for some kind of intervention? Were my intellectual knots untied?

Hardly, but it didn't matter. I remember saying the child's name, declaring that this life was holy, blessing the mother, blessing the room that despite appearances was sacred space, blessing the nurses for having the courage to do their hard, tender work.

Reinhold Niebuhr says that prayer "is not about hearing voices, it is about acquiring a voice." Gerry, wherever you are, thank you for helping me acquire mine.

*Nathan Detering
Sherborn, Mass.*

Gary, the youth pastor, handed me a worn folder with the information from previous mission trips. "I want you to look through this file to get an idea of how the previous trips were organized. Then we'll meet to plan how we will approach the next one."

I was only in my second year of working with the youth group, and Gary was asking me to organize, train and lead the weeklong mission trip for 20 youths and adults. I said yes to

Gary's request without comprehending the amount of responsibility that he placed on me.

We meet weekly to review plans and brainstorm ideas. Then we held six weeks of training meetings for all of the participants. At one training session, Gary suggested that we arrange the chairs in a circle for a more collegial atmosphere. My younger sister, who was in middle school, sat in the chair next to mine, and during the meeting we joked together in our sibling shorthand while excluding everyone else.

At my next meeting with Gary, he suggested that our bantering and laughing had been a distraction. "It doesn't help others to see you as the leader when you're laughing and talking with your sister," Gary said. "It undermines your leadership." I was embarrassed. He reassured me that it wasn't a catastrophe, just don't do it again.

After the trip concluded, Gary gave me his observations, insights and feedback on my work from beginning to end. He affirmed my organizing skills and my ability to lead a group of people, including my peers. He asked me for my observations and reflections and also asked me to write them down for inclusion in the file for the next mission trip.

It was only years later that I understood what an exceptional mentor Gary was. His relationship shaped me as I became a leader and mentor myself.

*June Mears Driedger
Lansing, Mich.*

He was a former pastor selling insurance to other pastors. A serious health problem had forced him to take early retirement from ministry. We had a cup of coffee one morning at a local restaurant when he said to me, "Never abandon your children or your wife for the church. I did. And I've had to repair a lot of damage. I've written letters of apology to my children and to my wife. I've told them how sorry I am that I wasn't there for them. I missed too many soccer games and dance recitals and moments with my family. It cost them dearly—and me, too."

Across that small table in a small-town Oklahoma restaurant, his words made a deep impact on me. His strained face and wearied body spoke volumes.

He became our family's investment counselor, and a few years later he truly retired and moved away.

I've used his words with younger pastors, with the promise:

"Later, you won't have to write letters of apology to your children or to your spouse." I don't recall his name, but I will never forget his passion. I will always be grateful for his honesty, a powerful reminder of what counts.

*Thomas P. Eggebeen
Los Angeles*

As a freshly scrubbed seminarian, I was attending my first required session of spiritual direction. Margaret motioned me to a chair. I caught sight of what appeared to be a little rag doll sitting in another chair. It had long, straggly brown hair, a wisp of a beard, a simple burlap robe, and a cross around its neck. A Jesus doll?

"Let's just sit in silence for a bit," Margaret offered. After a few minutes, Margaret offered a short prayer. After she opened her eyes, she could see that I was still distracted by the presence of the doll in the chair next to us.

"That's Jesus," she said. "He's here to remind us that this is not primarily a conversation between you and me, but a conversation between you and him. I am just a companion along the way."

What a cheesy gimmick, I thought. And yet, curiously, over the course of my many subsequent visits with Margaret, it was this simple doll and not the other more obviously holy objects in her room – the icons, candles and crosses – that most consistently reminded me of a holy presence in our midst.

"So, how do you pray?" Margaret asked. This was a question I had feared she would ask. "The truth is," I said, "I have trouble praying on my own."

"So tell me what your morning is like. What helps you to start your day?"

"Well," I said, "I love nothing more than sitting down with a good cup of coffee and just taking a moment to consider the day ahead."

"Have you ever tried sharing your cup of coffee with Jesus?"

"What exactly do you mean?"

"Well," she said, "the next time you sit down to have your coffee in the morning, close your eyes, take a moment to feel the warmth of the cup between your hands, smell the aroma of the coffee, and then just imagine that Jesus is sitting across the kitchen table from you. And as you sit there, try to feel his presence, and listen as carefully as you can to what he might be

asking you, right then and there. Whom does he see? What are his hopes for you? What do you think he loves most about you? And if you had just this one chance to say something to him from the depths of your heart, what might it be?"

Never had I imagined praying in such an unconventional way, just sitting with Jesus over a cup of coffee. And so began a practice of prayer that has stayed with me ever since.

*Luther Zeigler
Cambridge, Mass.*

My family moved frequently during my childhood, and we would flit in and out of churches for holidays or short periods of Sunday school until the next move. When I was 13, however, we settled in a town in Pennsylvania. A friend discovered how much I loved to sing and invited me to join the youth choir at her church, which was part of the United Church of Christ. There the Spirit awakened in me a love of liturgy, church music and a community of people caring deeply for one another.

A year later Russ came to be our interim pastor. A not-so-retired radical, Russ had marched in Washington and elsewhere for civil rights. He took over our confirmation class, a group of sullen high school students with low expectations. With passion and poetry he "opened up" the prophets. I began to see God alive and active all over our city and the world.

A few days after my 15th birthday, Russ stopped me as I was leaving the church to ask if I had ever considered going into the ministry. I had never seen a woman minister and had no idea the career was open to women. Flabbergasted and confused, I asked if that was even possible. He assured me that outside northeastern Pennsylvania the UCC was indeed ordaining women. I assured him I knew what I wanted to be (a French teacher, or perhaps a journalist), and minister was not even on the list. He smiled and said, "We'll see."

Russ was interim pastor for only six months, and when he left he dutifully severed contact with the congregation. When I left for college, however, he and I began a correspondence that would last until his death. He sent me poetry – often about justice issues – and letters of encouragement. When I went to seminary, he urged me on despite my fears of failure or inadequacy. During my first pastorate, he continued writing with advice, good humor, challenge and compassion. Whenever I have been tempted to give up on the church, or myself, I hear Russ's

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encouragement. Whenever I have been tempted to ignore or soft-pedal issues of justice, I remember Russ's agitation.

A few years ago, a regional minister called to ask if I would work with a group of newly ordained women clergy as a mentor. As I looked at my overflowing calendar, my first impulse was to say no. Then I heard Russ's words again, "We'll see," and I said yes.

*Rochelle A. Stackhouse
Hamden, Conn.*

Katherine was a professor of early childhood education at the University of California. I met her when she was in her sixties and I was 30, divorced, the mother of a two-year-old and a teacher in a public high school. The title of the class, "The Far Reaches of Human Experience," spoke to my spiritual yearning.

Katherine did not give advice. She wondered with me. During a conversation about one of my papers, she wondered whether I might want to come to Quaker meeting for worship. Having come out of a conservative religious upbringing, I had not been part of a faith community for over ten years. I accepted her invitation. Sitting in silence with others in Quaker meeting, I knew that I had found a home.

I took other classes that Katherine taught, and for several years I went to Katherine's house every Monday night to par-

ticipate in a meditation and active imaging group. Later I met with her alone.

When I spoke of how my teaching was no longer meaningful, Katherine wondered whether I had ever thought about going to seminary. Although I had been looking at graduate programs, seminary had not occurred to me. Within a year I had taken a leave from my job and had begun classes at seminary. Like other women of my background and generation, I had married a seminary student, not aware of my own deep desire to go to seminary.

Yet another invitation from Katherine was simply: "I wonder if you'd like Pendle Hill." I was able to create an independent study that allowed my daughter and me to live and study at that Quaker intentional community in Pennsylvania for three months.

At age 42, I was finishing seminary in Minnesota when a woman asked me, "May I come and talk to you?" That request began the work of spiritual direction that I still do. I often say to those I direct, "I wonder . . ."

*Marilyn Benson
St. Paul, Minn.*

I was 35 years old, six months departed from a ten-year marriage, mother of an eight-year-old, and two years past having left the denomination of my childhood. My life was messy. I had been a pastor for five years but now had no church home, and I'd recently quit my job at a bookstore. I was bunking with a buddy.


I saw an ad in the newspaper for a church administrative position. I needed a job, and I could do this one. I phoned and learned from the receptionist that the senior minister had already interviewed three candidates and was close to making a decision. "Please," I said. "If I could just speak with him, I think this might be a good match for your congregation and me." She invited me to come in that afternoon.

So, needing a job, any job, I interviewed with Gordon. After an hour of conversation, I wanted very much to work with him. I knew that I had plenty more to learn about ministry and that he had plenty to teach me.

I started the following Monday. That Friday Gordon bounded into my office waving papers and asking if he could read to me his sermon for that coming Sunday. "Tell me what you think," he said. "Tell me what's missing, what it needs." And he began to read aloud.

I was stunned. He was a well-known leader serving a big-steeple church. I was nobody. But for five years, every Friday by noontime Gordon showed up and read his sermon aloud. He invited critique, welcomed dialogue, sought a new perspective.

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Five years later it was time to leave. He had helped me rediscover my best self, as well as teaching me a thing or two about ministry. Thank you, Gordon.

*Janet E. Powers
West Springfield, Mass.*

In my early twenties I was a member of a tiny church in western Massachusetts where ten to 20 people worshiped on Sundays. When the pastor retired, the three of us on the search committee had trouble finding any clergy interested in serving such a small congregation, in such a small town, in a part-time position.

Howard, a retired pastor and a veteran of the civil rights movement, took me aside one Sunday and asked: "Heidi, what if you became the pastor of the church?" I was totally shocked and totally delighted.

Though it seemed impossible for someone so young and with no seminary degree, I became the licensed lay pastor. I could preach, teach and offer the sacraments, but only in our church and our town. The area minister assigned me a mentor: a seasoned woman pastor who tried to be supportive. But my most influential mentors were my congregation: MaryKate, Steve S., Dick, George, Bonnie, Mary, Ray, Sally, Steve P., Judy, C. J., Susan, Tamsin, Howard and Valerie. They were with me on Sundays, they encouraged me, and they endured my fumbles.

My first funeral was for Ray, who had been pastor of the church many decades before. When he died, his family called another pastor, a friend of Ray's. That pastor then called me out of professional courtesy. I panicked. Should I respect the family's privacy? Or should I reach out to them? I called MaryKate and told her I didn't know what to do. She said to me, "If you did know what to do, what would you do?"

I took a deep breath and I called the family. I can't remember what we said to each other, but somehow I ended up at their house. Our tiny church was overflowing with people for the memorial service. I stood in front of them and felt

too young and very much an outsider. But I saw Ray's wife sitting with her family in the front pews and other church members sitting in the crowd. I didn't have any seminary training or CPE credits, but my congregation and Ray's family believed I could be their pastor, and so I was.

Today I serve a church in the suburbs of Chicago. A picture of that Massachusetts church hangs in my study. I still regularly ask myself MaryKate's question: "If you did know what to do, what would you do?"

*Heidi Haverkamp
Bolingbrook, Ill.*

The religion I inherited from my parents felt utterly sour and doubtful. Church seemed more like a sing-along social club than a place for healing. Few would address my questions about biblical authority or theories of atonement without making me feel lost and heretical. I decided to spend a summer at a cloister. Sister Scholastica wrote back, "OK, Brother Garrett. Come and see. We will talk."

Sister Scholastica listened intently as I ranted and raved about how I didn't know if I believed anymore, or if I even wanted to believe. She said, "But didn't you come so that you might believe?" I said I didn't know. "Brother Garrett, I think you want to believe. We all want to believe. We are glad that you came. So, what chores would you like to do?" I emphati-

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cally stated that I did not enjoy doing dishes, and yard work suited me best.

“Good, then you will do the dishes. And, Brother Garrett, when you are doing the dishes, listen to God speaking. Find God in the dishes—it’s more important than doctrine and theology, which seem to upset you.”

A month into washing dishes and regular monastic life, frustration screamed through my veins as God seemed eternally absent. I told Sister Scholastica, and she invited me to walk through the forest. “How are the dishes?” The spiritual dish washing was not working. I spoke at length before she interrupt-

ed, “Brother Garrett, you talk so very much. Do you know how to listen?” When I responded no, she led me to a cramped, dank prayer room. “Sit here, focus on God, and do not talk.”

I resolved to follow the monastery’s vow of silence, which lasts from after vespers until mass the following morning. I hoped to achieve silence most of the day, so that when Sister Scholastica told me to be silent again, I could boast proudly about my accomplishments. I resolved to prove her wrong on every point so as to justify my thoughts and actions.

The silence was not silent at all. Anger swelled in my heart toward Sister Scholastica. I hated her for telling me to be quiet and not agreeing with my standpoint.

“How is the silence?” she asked. I said it was awful, and she asked, “What are you learning?” I confessed my own selfishness and arrogance. She smiled and nodded, “Yes, I struggle with those, too.” I asked what we should do and she said, “We should continue to listen to God. Follow me.”

She led me into the cloister’s mortuary. Outside the door, she whispered, “A sister passed away last night.” I said I was sorry. “Yes, it is sad. Now, Brother Garrett, let’s not be so selfish anymore. Go pray for your sisters.” I pushed through the door and there rested a corpse with two sisters sobbing over it. I sat praying until they asked, “Would you like to know who she was?” For an afternoon, I listened to them and prayed for them.

By the end of summer, the dish washing became tolerable and I grew accustomed to silence. On our final walk, she asked, “What is God teaching you?” I updated her: God’s teaching me to join the life of the church if I want to change it; God’s showing me to appreciate others’ views on Christ while seeking what I truly believe; God’s asking me to listen to the Bible and not others’ views on it; and God is granting me peace from my noisy, untamed heart. She smiled. “Brother Garrett, you still have much to learn, but you have done very well. Perhaps you would enjoy doing the dishes twice a day?”

*Garrett Mostowski
Montrose, Colo.*



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He walked into my room unannounced. He was short and gruff. I thought, “Who is this guy?” Dan wanted me to do field education at his church. I’d just been turned down for a field education position at an inner-city church where I had hoped to do commu-

nity organizing. Dan was offering me the opportunity to do youth ministry. Youth ministry?

I'd come to seminary to study social ethics and become a neighborhood activist. I didn't want to do youth ministry.

But there was something alluring about the guy. Maybe it was the fact that he noticed the shiny volumes of Reinhold Niebuhr's *The Nature and Destiny of Man* in my bookcase. Or maybe it was his pithy phrases. In that first brief conversation he observed that "Niebuhr's diagnosis is better than his prescription." He finished his sales pitch with, "Ponder it, and let me know what you think."

I had real doubts about becoming a pastor. And then there were the youth at the church who seemed to have fallen into the depths of that peculiar form of mental illness that sets in around seventh grade and lasts about five years.

The saving grace in the midst of it all was Dan. He knew theology, history and social ethics and made connections between his reading and the practical problems of ministry. Still more pithy phrases sprang out: "Don't generalize from a limited sample." "Forgiveness is not just a theological principle, it's a practical necessity." I marveled at his ability to do ministry on the fly while contrasting himself with those pastors who (as he said) "really knew what they were doing."

A crucial point in our relationship came one weekend. I was preaching that Sunday, and Dan and his wife had invited me to spend Saturday night at the parsonage. I was up late working on the sermon while Dan was watching a hockey game. Coming

downstairs to make myself a cup of coffee, I told Dan that I was jealous of him because I was working hard on the sermon while he got to relax on a Saturday night in front of the television. Dan responded in typical gruff fashion: "Well, you'd better get use to it, because I think you're going to be a pastor someday, even if you don't think so!" His words stopped me in my tracks. I thought, "If this man whose mind I deeply respect thinks I have what it takes to be a pastor, then I'd better think very seriously about becoming one." Two years later, Dan preached at my ordination.

Dan supervised many seminary students during his decades of ministry. I'm sure each one would say that they felt like Dan's favorite. He had a way of being so focused on you and so accepting of you that you felt as if you were cherished like none other.

*Bruce D. Ervin
Bloomington, Ind.*

We started off on the wrong foot. Eric Teye-Kau, a minister of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, was going to serve the Moravian Church of South Africa, financially sponsored by the organization for which I worked, the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity. When Eric and his family arrived at the Durban airport, no one was waiting to meet them. Because of inclement weather, the MCSA welcoming committee was hours late. Disappointed and bewildered, Eric called me in Germany, thousands of miles away.



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In Eric's first weeks in South Africa, he and I telephoned almost daily. I was the first point of contact for every problem. Visa difficulties? Call Riley. Problems getting the children settled into schools? Call Riley. Tensions with the local church administration? Call Riley. Financial strains? Call Riley. It wasn't easy for me to handle those calls. Often the connection was poor. I couldn't help wondering if there were persons closer at hand who would be better able to help.

At the same time, there was something about those calls that I liked. I realized that Eric was indeed taking me seriously as his mentor. In his estimation, I was someone who

could be of assistance in spite of the enormous differences and distance.

For several months, Eric and his family plunged from crisis to crisis. By the time I paid my first visit to Eric in South Africa, he was in conflict with the local church council and the MCSA administration. One person even read out a list of grievances. I saw little chance of the situation being resolved.

I noticed some large piles of rocks outside Eric's home. Eric was a prize-winning farmer in addition to being a minister, and he had begun preparing to plow the acreage traditionally allotted to the pastor of this South African congrega-

tion. The custom went back to the days of the Moravian missionaries of the 19th century, who were generally German. The ministers were expected to meet their living costs by the fruits of their agricultural labor. However, it had been decades since anyone had plowed those fields. Would Eric, a child of the tropics, know how to farm in a temperate climate?

I was wrong to doubt him. By my next visit a year later, the pastoral acreage was bearing corn, green peppers, tomatoes, onions, okra and potatoes. On spiritual matters, he informed me that he had expanded the liturgy to include a time in which the congregation spoke in tongues and that he had embarked upon a program of healing visitation to the sick. "Is that what the people want?" I asked, a bit doubtful. I also spoke to the person who a year before had presented the grievances. Still peeved, the person had added "faith healing" to the list of complaints. Still, I sensed that the tide was turning.

By the next year, Eric had converted the garage into an informal vegetable market, and additional produce was sold to local supermarkets. Even more impressive was the proliferation of garden plots all over town. Before this, local initiative had been lacking, the general assumption being that if you can't farm on a large scale, there's no point in farming at all. Yet Eric had proven the opposite. Worship services were now long, noisy and well attended, with the average age of the congregants dropping by the month.

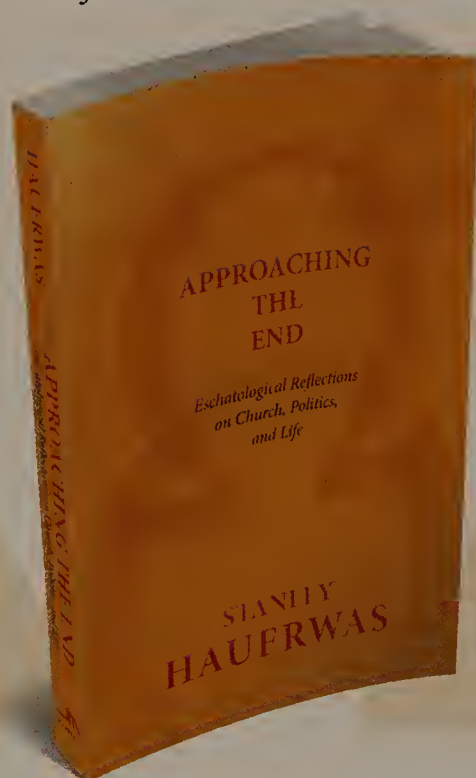
Eric's contract recently came to an end, and he and his family returned to Ghana. No mentor ever received more than I received from Eric Teye-Kau.

*Riley Edwards-Raudonat
Stuttgart, Germany*

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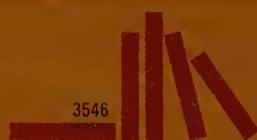
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After I finished my first year of seminary I became the student pastor at a Disciples of Christ church in Missouri. It was a part-time position designed to have rotating responsibilities each semester, based on my coursework. Since I had just finished a course titled "Effective Hospital Ministry" it made sense to add hospital and home-bound visitations to my list of duties.

I hated it. I always felt awkward walking into a hospital room or someone's home and trying to strike up a conversation that seemed, to me at least, to be artificial and inauthentic. It got to the point where I would conveniently "forget" to go make visits.

I shared my frustrations and difficulties with Jill, the senior pastor, and she recommended that I take a unit of clinical pastoral education (CPE) sooner rather than later, because it would help me to become a better pastoral caregiver and visitor. The problem was that I didn't want to do CPE. I had been regaled with tales of CPE supervisors belittling and tearing down students to the point of tears. On top of all of that, it would make me engage in more visits with people I didn't even know.

In the Disciples of Christ, ordination requirements can vary from region to region. When I entered the ordination process, I was in a region that required one unit of CPE, but roughly halfway through my seminary journey I relocated to a region that did not have such a requirement. I was in the process of trying to move my ordination process to the new region.

I explained to Jill why moving my ordination process was a good thing to do. She said, "Tyler, we have a close enough relationship that I can say this to you: you have a tendency to avoid difficult things. I think that CPE is an example. You're afraid of the hard work that you might have to do. You might be afraid of looking inside yourself. Sure, you have a lot of good excuses not to take a unit of CPE, but when it comes down to it, I think you don't want to do it because you're afraid it will be difficult."

She was right. I was afraid of the hard work that would come along with the CPE. And I was afraid of reliving painful memories of sitting in an intensive-care unit waiting room wondering if my mother would survive a drug overdose. I was afraid of unfruitful, awkward conversations with sick strangers. I was afraid of being vulnerable. At the time it seemed like she was just trying to push my buttons. Looking back, I realize that she was touching on a prominent character flaw.

My first CPE unit was difficult. I cried. I wrestled with demons from my past. I had to come to terms with the fact that vulnerability and difficulty are part of ministry.

I am now working as a chaplain at a hospital—something that I swore I would never do. What happened to change me? I had a mentor who wasn't afraid to confront me and call me out.

*Tyler Whipkey
Laurens, Iowa*

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Premarital wisdom

by Amy Frykholm

WHEN STEPHANIE AND ROBIN came to see Episcopal priest Ali Lufkin, they were not thinking about arranging a commitment ceremony. They simply wanted Lufkin to help them work through the difficulties that their very different backgrounds and histories brought to their relationship.

Stephanie had been married to a man and raised three children. Robin had struggled for years with living out her sexual orientation while belonging to a religious community that disapproved of it. “We wanted to draw wise people around us,” Stephanie said, “who might help us to see what we might not be able to see.”

Eventually, however, the two decided they wanted a covenant ceremony, and this led to a new set of questions: What would the ceremony look like? What would their vows say? How did they each interpret the meaning of a covenantal relationship? How would friends and family respond to their relationship and this public witness to it? There wasn’t a script already written for them.

While accompanying Stephanie and Robin as they explored these questions, Lufkin prepared her congregation for what would be its first-ever same-sex ceremony. She held a series of meetings before the Sunday evening service in which she handed out copies of the Episcopal Church’s newly minted service, “Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant.” She asked what it would mean for the community to be offering this blessing.

The discussions between Stephanie, Robin, Lufkin and the church community required much more of each participant than the usual wedding preparation. This was partly because Stephanie and Robin, like many same-sex couples, had a history and a set of concerns that needed attention in ways different from opposite-sex couples. It was also because the community was in the process of reevaluating and reconfiguring what it meant to bless a couple in its midst.

Nancy Wiener, a professor at Hebrew Theological Union and author of *Beyond Breaking the Glass* (a guide for same-sex and opposite-sex Jewish couples), says clergy frequently need to expand the way they think and talk about marriage and commitment when they are working with same-sex couples. Clergy are often unprepared, she says, for the openness with which gay and lesbian couples talk about their prior relationships and the complexity of those relationships. Same-sex couples may have been in prior heterosexual relationships, or they

may have former partners who are now closer than family members. Wiener says that lesbian and gay couples can often be more practiced at talking about sex and sexuality than clergy are. And in addition to these dynamics, they often need and want to talk about the social and family pressures that shaped their coming-out process.

Wiener has been offering union ceremonies as part of her work as a Reform rabbi for several decades. Neil Thomas, pastor at the Metropolitan Community Church in Los Angeles, has also walked many couples through this process, and he thinks that the additional complexities make premarital counseling a challenge for clergy, who mainly have encountered opposite-sex couples.

“Counseling gay couples has transformed the way I think about marriage.”

Among the complexities: a partner in a couple may or may not identify as “lesbian” or “gay.” One partner may consider herself bisexual or transgendered or may have developed a personalized vocabulary for her sexuality. Couples also bring questions about monogamy and the presence or absence of children in the relationship that have different meanings for same-sex couples. Ministers need to respect these particularities in order to “set up a dynamic where people can have an honest conversation and make it safe,” Thomas said.

Same-sex couples often come to clergy with a history of grappling with discrimination. Elaine Casquarelli, a professor in counselor education at the College at Brockport, part of the State University of New York, notes that this history can leave its mark on people in different ways. How has each experienced and dealt with discrimination? What wounds does he or she carry from the past? How did church-related institutions help to inflict these wounds? This is important—and often painful—territory to cover in counseling a couple.

Same-sex couples also face the question of visibility in a way that is not shared with opposite-sex couples. Not all want to be public in exactly the same way. Questions arise, such as: Is each person in the couple comfortable with public displays of affection? Are they going to dance at the company Christmas party together or hold hands at the park? How does each perceive the readiness of their communities to receive them as a couple?

The issue of visibility also comes into play when the couple plans the ceremony itself. Getting married can be a new process of coming out. It may involve announcing one's relationship to a broader community of family and friends. Hiring a caterer and having invitations printed raise questions about who knows what and who needs to know.

Robin found this out for herself when she prepared invitations to the ceremony. She hesitated a few minutes before sending the wording of the ceremony to a local print shop. She had been acquainted with the owner for years and attended church with him, and she knew he was an outspoken, conservative Christian. She was not sure she wanted to expose herself or Stephanie to his criticism or perhaps his refusal to print the invitations. But she went ahead and sent him her e-mail. "I've been hiding my whole life. I just decided I wasn't going to do it

anymore." She received the printed invitations the next day without incident.

Many ministers who work with same-sex couples say this work has illuminated their understanding of marriage generally and changed the counseling they do with all couples. "My counseling with gay couples has transformed the way I

With same-sex couples, issues about gender roles tend to surface quickly.

think about what makes a marriage," said Rabbi Denise Eger of the Kol Ami Congregation in Hollywood. "It undoes some of my assumptions—assumptions I didn't even know were there."

Many of these assumptions are hidden in the traditional wedding ceremony. When the couple being joined is a man and a woman, traditional practices may be followed unconsciously, but with a same-sex couple everyone will notice the implied



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gender roles. Who walks whom down the aisle? Where and how are the couples' parents seated?

In workshops as well as in premarital counseling, Wiener takes couples and clergy through each step of the traditional Jewish ritual, discussing its symbolic and historical significance. "Who arrives at the ceremony first? Who breaks the glass? Who says the first vow? Each act communicates something about how the couple imagines its life in community and how it interprets the personal and social history that brought them

to this moment." She reminds her listeners that the ceremony that has been passed down comes from its own particular historical and geographic moment. It isn't a timeless document; it is an enshrinement of medieval and European Judaism.

Even if the couple does not ascribe particular gendered meaning to each ritual act, Wiener points out, the gathered community might. "People watching a ritual take away far more than what is happening on the surface. We can't let that dictate what we do. It is important not to get overly concerned about what people think. But the couple needs to act intentionally if they want to help people interpret the meaning of the ritual."

The ritual enacted at a ceremony can be a precursor to how a particular power dynamic plays out amid the basic tasks of everyday life. What does it mean that one person in the partnership ends up being the bill payer or the cook or the person who mows the lawn? With opposite-sex couples, these assumptions can remain below the surface for decades. With same-sex couples, the issues are likely to surface more quickly. Eger says that working with same-sex couples has taught her to raise these questions with all couples.

Thomas sees the potential depth of these new conversations as a gift not only to the couple but to clergy. Same-sex couples who come to him for premarital counseling have often "done a lot of soul searching" about what it means to get married in a church, he said. "These are folks who are giving God a second or a 93rd chance. . . . When a gay couple comes to a church, there is often a deeper spiritual significance to it because, through struggle, it has become a part of who they are in a different way."

Eger has observed how these conversations and ceremonies can have a profound impact on couples' families. "Often the wedding ceremony provides an opportunity for families to be healed," she said. Parents who have become alienated from their children, with religious issues playing a large role, are often transformed by watching their children make a covenantal commitment to another person.

Thomas has seen the relationship between same-sex couples and their families change dramatically over the past 20 years. "We used to worry that



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family members would show up” at union celebrations, he said—show up and be unpleasant. Now most families stand in support of the couple. He is even starting to see signs of families putting pressure on same-sex couples to get married.

Eger perceives that same-sex ceremonies—whether they are called weddings or not—tend to have greater emotional and spiritual intensity than opposite-sex weddings. In her experience, when an opposite-sex couple sends out invitations, about 20 percent of those invited attend. For same-sex couples, the guest attendance rate is more like 95 percent. She believes that people rally to these ceremonies, seeing them as an opportunity to make a

Same-sex ceremonies are often moments of healing.

social and a spiritual statement not only about same-sex relationships but about the idea of marital commitment and fidelity.

When the Episcopal Church surveyed clergy in advance of a 2012 report on same-sex blessings, it found that clergy overwhelmingly wanted a more specific template for conducting same-sex premarital counseling, said Thad Bennett, a member of the survey committee. They did not want generalities like, “Ask about families of origin.” They wanted specific questions to ask and rich resources to draw from. Perhaps that desire reflects their feeling underprepared to provide premarital counseling of any kind, Bennett said. “We often heard from clergy that they had very little preparation from seminaries.”

The church responded with a booklet titled “I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing: Resources for the Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant in a Same-Sex Relationship.” In this booklet, Bennett and others lay out a five-session template for preparing same-sex couples.

Session One tackles church background and theology concerning the rite that will be performed. Sessions Two and Three look at families of origin, conflict resolution, money and sex. Session Four addresses the couple’s desires for their future together. Session Five begins the work of talking through the ceremony.

Despite the specificity of the document, Bennett hopes that clergy will use it as an outline and a resource, not as a script. Echoing Thomas, he points to the importance of treating each couple as a unique pair with a particular history. Already, traditional preparatory materials used by clergy are changing to reflect the fact that couples come in many different forms—including couples entering their second marriage or couples who bring children into a relationship or couples who are getting married after many years of living together. This flexibility requires new skills from clergy, but it deepens and broadens the conversation for everyone—for those who bless and for those who will be blessed.



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Faith MATTERS

by Stephanie Paulsell

As if

BELIEF IS a hot issue in literary criticism. In the last few years literary critics have explored postmodern belief, lamented the disappearance of the novel of belief, and attempted to sharpen the distinction between religious and literary belief.

An example of the last can be seen in critic James Wood's recent *New Yorker* essay on fiction and death. Wood draws a sharp distinction between the belief that fiction asks of us and the belief that religion requires. Fiction depends upon the belief of the reader to grant its fictional world a kind of reality, if only for a time. Literary belief is always belief "as if." It is metaphorical, not actual. This is fine for fiction, but for religion, Wood insists, such belief is a danger. Believing "as if" a religion's claims are true either signals an impending loss of belief or is simply "bad faith."

But does believing "as if" really pose a danger to religion? Does religious belief truly have no metaphorical quality to it? Does believing "as if" religious ideas were true inevitably lead us away from faith?

In her MaddAddam trilogy, novelist Margaret Atwood explores how belief might function in the worst possible circumstances. Rescued from a brutal employer by adherents of the God's Gardeners religion—invented by Atwood, complete with hymns, sermons and a sacred calendar—Toby balks when she is invited to take a leadership position in the sect. She is grateful for her rescue, but she can't imagine believing everything the Gardeners believe.

The sect's founder points out that she's been acting and living as if she believed and urges her to see belief not as the precursor to action, but the other way around. He insists that the words *as if*, rather than signaling a loss of faith, open a door to faith's deepening. "Continue to live according to them and belief will follow in time."

Toby spends the rest of Atwood's trilogy testing that notion. After surviving a catastrophe that destroys most of the human race, she asks herself, "Do I still believe this?" Each time another article of Gardener faith is challenged, Toby's willingness to experiment with believing "as if" leads her not away from Gardener convictions but to a deeper and riskier engagement with them.

At the end of the second book, *The Year of the Flood*, Toby captures a pair of criminals who have terrorized other survivors. She has an opportunity to kill them, and her companions wish she would. These men are so dehumanized and vicious that even the most nonviolent reader might wish them dead. If they escape, it is clear, they will only seek to do harm.

But according to the sacred calendar of the Gardeners, it is the Feast of St. Julian and All Souls, a day to honor everything that lives. Toby is determined to observe the feast as if it matters. I don't know what will happen tomorrow, she tells her companions, but tonight we observe the Feast. And she passes cups of soup among everyone gathered, brutalized and brutalizers alike.

Critic Paul Elie says he longs to find an author whose novels show what belief actually feels like. Wood might say that religious belief feels like the contraction of possibilities (as opposed to what he calls "secular expansion")—an unchangeable acceptance of unchangeable truth claims. But belief is not a static thing any more than religions and their ideas are. Toby's experimental and yet deeply consequential approach to belief reflects for me what belief feels like—oscillating and yet anchoring; uncertain and yet world-opening—much more than the belief described by critics for whom it must be either certain or false.

Does believing "as if" undermine faith?

In the fifth-grade Sunday school class I help teach, we recently talked about the book of Daniel. The kids loved the stories but rolled their eyes when we talked about Daniel surviving a night with the lion and three men walking out of the furnace unsinged. The eye-rolling lent an "as if" quality to our discussion—not in Wood's sense of literary belief, but in the fifth-grade sense of "Yeah, right. As if."

Nelson Mandela had died the week before, and when stories of his life came up in our discussion, the connection to the book of Daniel was not lost on the kids. Mandela emerged from prison and, rather than seeking vengeance, began to build a nation with those who had imprisoned him. It was as if a man thrown into a lion's den by a powerful ruler had emerged alive and whole. It was as if three men thrown into a blazing furnace had lived to tell the tale.

Our kids may not have believed the story of Daniel in the lion's den, but by thinking with it "as if," they began to see the truth of it and what that truth can mean here and now. I hope they began to experience belief as a living, moving, creative force that opens more possibilities than they can even yet imagine.

Stephanie Paulsell teaches at Harvard Divinity School.

IN Review

Holding on and letting go

by LaVonne Neff

The title *The Geography of Memory* gives no hint of the rich content in this volume, and the subtitle *A Pilgrimage Through Alzheimer's* is downright scary. Been there (both my parents had Alzheimer's), done that (I was in charge of their care for seven challenging years), did not get the T-shirt (is there one?).

Still, I was eager to read Jeanne Murray Walker's account of her mother's last years. Though the aging-parent memoir has become a crowded genre now that most boomers' parents are over 80, I suspected that Walker—a published poet, the author of plays that have actually seen footlights, and a professor of English at the University of Delaware—would see senescence through a fresh lens. I was not disappointed.

The story opens with a midnight phone call in 2008 delivering the news that Walker's mother, Erna, has died at age 93. Walker and her husband are in Paris, and Erna is 5,000 miles away, in Dallas. Walker and her sister, Julie, had been caring for their mom for ten years.

Erna's freezer had been Walker's first clue that something was amiss. When she opened it in search of ice, several packages of ham spilled out onto the floor. Walker's mother never ate ham. It seemed unlikely that she would eat the two giant roasts or the whole goose, either. This looked "like a freezer owned by a mother on another planet," Walker writes. Later that day, looking in a desk drawer for paper, Walker discovered a tangle of office supplies, letters, coupons, photos and unpaid bills. Her mother had "always been obsessively clean and orderly," to the point of lining up paper clips in rows. What was going on?

To anyone who has taken care of

someone with dementia, the answer is obvious—Walker's mother's brain was deteriorating, whether because of Alzheimer's, strokes or some other process. Why else would she forget about a party she'd been helping to plan, or lose the tax records needed by her accountant, or miss appointments because she mixed up the days of the week? And why else would she come up with clever ways to compensate so that most people—including her primary care physician—would not suspect anything was wrong?

The story's trajectory is sadly predictable. Erna's condition deteriorated. Her daughters joined forces (and sometimes squabbled) as they tried to care for her, often against her wishes. Erna moved from a bungalow to an assisted-living apartment to a room in the Alzheimer's unit. The daughters were at their wits' end. Erna died.

If this were the whole story, *The Geography of Memory* would quickly lapse into obscurity along with all those other boomer memoirs. But Walker's book stands out for several reasons.

For one, the writing is superb. Walker wields a mean metaphor and uses telling details to create scenes and depict characters. See her at age ten, a lonely child at church camp for the first time, falling in love with "a greenish plastic cross":

It's about the width of a table knife and the height of a Popsicle stick, and it is affixed to a rawhide string. I stand at the display table staring at it, keeping myself very still. I can feel my heartbeat in my wrists, which dangle at my sides. In the stifling Nebraska summer afternoon, a trickle of sweat runs down my stomach. I cannot

The Geography of Memory: A Pilgrimage Through Alzheimer's

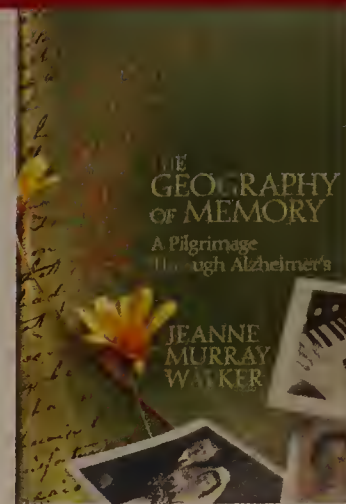
By Jeanne Murray Walker
Center Street, 384 pp., \$22.00

believe how beautiful the cross is. A little placard explains that it glows in the dark.

Another appealing feature of Walker's book is its delicate balance between realism and optimism. Yes, Erna has her quirks, and they increase as she gets older. Yes, trying to meet her needs from 1,500 miles away is worrying, frustrating and exhausting, and cooperating with the sister who lives near Erna in Dallas can stir up latent sibling rivalry. But Walker depicts her mother, her sister and the other characters, whom she clearly loves, with respect and compassion. She even finds something to like about dementia: "I learned that to stay and struggle through Alzheimer's is to reap gifts that may not come any other way."

The story of these gifts, however, is not much like the strength-through-suffering trope typical of most survivor memoirs. These are gifts of understanding. "Mother, like all of us, carried her former selves inside her, almost as if they were characters in a play," Walker writes. "As she verged into dementia, her earlier selves came and went at will." Instead of dismissing her mother's often bizarre comments as nonsense, Walker learned to figure out which version of her mother was speaking, to understand her words as metaphor, and to apply their meaning to her present circumstances.

LaVonne Neff blogs at *Lively Dust* and reviews books at the *Neff Review*.



While coming to understand her mother's speech, Walker also deepened her understanding of her own history. Paradoxically, as her mother's memory grew more and more jumbled, Walker's memory sprang to life. Returning with her mother to the past, she relived events she had never fully processed: her father's untimely death from heart disease, her teenage brother's death from unknown causes, her feelings of alienation from a family that didn't understand her interests or values.

The decade of needing to remember earlier times gave me an opportunity to retrace the stages of my teenage battle against my smart, valiant mother, to discover how oddly like her I am, too, how much of what she told me I was trying to pass on to my own children. That realization is one of the unexpected gifts that Alzheimer's brought.

Halfway through the book, I finally got it: this isn't just a tale about an elderly parent or a frazzled caregiver. It is also, and equally, a coming-of-age story, and Walker's deft juxtaposition of her own story with her mother's is its genius. These are my roots, Walker is saying: my wacky, indomitable, paranoid mother; my family's fundamentalist church, full of answers and rules but also full of love. And this is me: a reader, a scholar, a questioner, an Episcopalian, a Democrat—everything my community of origin is not. Walker muses that her mother probably “wondered what kind of a creature she was raising.” Yet even as the young Jeanne rebelled against her mother's deepest values, her mother “hung on to her beliefs and her people with one hand and on to [her defiant daughter] with the other.”

With *The Geography of Memory*, Walker has returned the favor. As a teenager she couldn't wait to get away from her mother, and her mother couldn't bear to let her go. Fifty years later she writes, “Now the tables are turned. Now I am giving my mother permission to go. Now I see how terribly difficult it is, that kind of letting go, how a person can say it and still not believe it.”

As clear-eyed and unsentimental as its title, Walker's memoir is nevertheless a moving story about mothers, daughters, love and, ultimately, God. “Life is short,” her priest told her, “and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who travel with us. So be swift to love, make haste to be kind, live without fear. Your Creator has made you holy, has always protected you, and loves you as a mother.”

Theology for Liberal Protestants: God the Creator

By Douglas F. Ottati
Eerdmans, 377 pp., \$38.00 paperback

Douglas Ottati is widely known as a wry and disarming teacher of liberal Reformed Protestantism. Through his teaching at Davidson College and at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia (now Union Presbyterian Seminary), and in volumes such as *Jesus Christ and Christian Vision*, *Hopeful Realism* and *Reforming Protestantism*, he has developed a rare gift for speaking clearly about God, the world and humanity in ways that illuminate the connections between classical theological propositions and ordinary living.

Theology for Liberal Protestants: God the Creator is the long-awaited first volume of his systematic theology. He offers a lengthy introduction to his overall project and theological method, followed by a discussion of creation that includes the classic themes of providence, theological anthropology, and God as Creator and Provider. The planned second volume will discuss God the Redeemer, with attention to Christology, sin and judgment, reconciliation and renewal, the church, history and eschatology.

As in previous work, Ottati explains his embrace of the much-maligned term *liberal*, clarifying that this descriptor signals his commitments to critical argu-

Reviewed by Martha Moore-Keish, who teaches theology at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia.



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ment, historical consciousness and “social criticism, engagement, and reform.” Such a broad account of liberalism surely includes many who shy away from the term. It might spark a fresh reclamation of liberal identity among mainline Protestants. A term that is equally maligned and defended by Ottati is *systematic* with reference to theology. He acknowledges critiques of the theological systems of Karl Barth and Gordon Kaufman, yet argues that systematic attention to the interaction of various aspects of Christian piety and belief leads to clarity, coherence and depth of understanding that are otherwise unavailable.

Ottati draws deeply from his theological forebears in the Reformed sub-tradition and, like them, is willing to critique distortions in his own strand of Christianity. From Calvin, he draws a fundamental commitment to theology “within the limits of piety alone”; from Edwards, attention to the importance of the religious affections; from Schleiermacher, the energy to revise theology in light of recent findings of history and science; from H. Richard Niebuhr and James Gustafson, an unflinching theocentric perspective and vigilant attention to the ethical consequences of theological statements. These influences, among others, become clear in his definition of theology as “practical wisdom that articulates a vision of God, the world, and ourselves in the service of a piety, a settled disposition, and a way of living.”

This is the genius of Ottati's work: he is ever illuminating ways that theology is a source for rather than an obstacle to piety and practical living. Those of us who teach theology in colleges and seminaries will rejoice at his winsome examples of how particular theological statements both express and shape concrete ethical life in the world. For instance, he reflects on the peculiar task of raising adolescent children. Recognizing that they challenge authority, sleep until noon and “lurch toward questionable decisions about their futures,” he points out that when we view them also as gifts of God who do not belong to us, we may find our dispositions shaped by gratitude to God and respect for the integrity of

our offspring. In such ordinary theological reflections, Ottati is a faithful follower of Calvin, who eschewed “idle speculation” that spends energy on abstract questions with no clear connection to faithful living.

At times Ottati is explicit about his distaste for idle speculation. In his discussion of doctrines of creation, for instance, he notes Jürgen Moltmann's proposal that “God makes room for creation by withdrawing his presence.” Though he acknowledges the rhetorical power of Moltmann's suggestion, he wonders about the speculative dimensions of such discourse. From the point of view of practical wisdom, can we ever know whether this is an accurate portrayal of creation? Can the biblical witness bear the weight of these reflections?

More subtle is Ottati's reservation regarding discussion of the immanent Trinity on the grounds that such a formulation of a “common divine nature, being, or substance” shared by God, Christ and Spirit is not required. He promises to discuss this fully in the forthcoming second volume. I wonder whether he regards this as another instance of theological speculation that is neither warranted by the biblical text nor especially fruitful when it comes to forming and shaping piety.

I share Ottati's commitment to theology that avoids speculation and focuses on piety and practical living. But how do we adjudicate what is idle speculation and what is appropriate symbolic language that shapes a piety of gratitude and an ethics of social engagement? For instance, Ottati suggests that Moltmann's view of creation *ex nihilo*, grounded as it is in the new creation of resurrection, is unduly speculative. But might it not be seen as powerful symbolic language (of the sort that Ottati himself uses) that points to God's creative transformation of the world—a theological commitment that grounds a piety of hope and inspires liberating political action?

One particularly excellent section, which could easily be excerpted for teaching purposes, is his lucid discussion of anti-Judaism in Christian theol-

ogy. This clear and forthright exposition is but one example of Ottati's calm willingness to expose Christian heresies of the past, even those that involve major theologians, without apology or defense. Noteworthy as well is the way that he condemns heresy without dismissing as wholly unworthy the theologians who perpetuated it. In this way, he displays in his theological method his Augustinian conviction that all people, even Christian theologians, are good creatures corrupted by sin and able, by the grace of God, to be redeemed.

Having read this first volume, I am left wondering about the relative invisibility of the Holy Spirit in Ottati's system so far. The treatment of creation and providence in this volume contains no discussion of the Spirit at all. The second volume will address both God's acts of redemption in Jesus Christ and the way that we "receive Christ's benefits" (as Calvin puts it) through the Holy Spirit. Yet unlike Calvin, Ottati does not distinguish his treatment of the Spirit from his treatment of God's act of reconciliation in Christ. I am curious about how this will finally work out: Will Ottati attend sufficiently to the particular work of the Spirit in creation and in human lives? What are the advantages of an integrated approach that does not separate out discussion of the Spirit? Is Ottati trying to move away from classical trinitarian speech out of concern that it borders on idle speculation about the inner workings of the triune God? Whatever the case, this lack of attention to Jesus Christ and the Spirit leaves me hungry for the next volume.

Whether or not you identify as a liberal Protestant, Ottati's work is eminently worth reading. He writes in the clear tones of a professor adept at engaging eager young undergraduates, as well as equally eager, sometimes overly pious seminarians uncertain about the whole enterprise of theology. With story, song and a calm narrative style, he lures his readers into theological reflection that attends at once to the ordinary details of human life and to expansive wonder at the glory of God.

At-Risk

By Amina Gautier
University of Georgia Press,
168 pp., \$18.95 paperback

The African-American children and teens in these potent stories are all at risk all of the time. Most readers who pick up this book already know about the dangers that these youths face as residents of a Brooklyn housing project: drug addiction and trafficking, gun violence and teen pregnancy. But most don't know what it's like to be them, to live minute to minute and day to day in a perilous setting. How do these youth find friends? How do they see their own neighborhoods and understand themselves in their setting? How are they pulled under from safety and innocence into the dangers that tug at them?

The power of these stories is in the way they portray that undertow. Amina Gautier pulls us inside the characters' lives so we learn—she said in an inter-

Reviewed by Debra Bendis, a senior editor at the
CENTURY.

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view with *Pif* magazine—"what they don't want anyone else to know about them." The characters include a teenager who's afraid of his peers' bullying, a restless teen mom who just wants to be a teen, a young man who knows that his friends will get him in trouble but who needs their companionship.

Gautier grew up in Brooklyn, in the 1980s and '90s, and she plumbs her experiences in these stories, taking readers with her into the unnerving tension of lives caught between internal turmoil and the culture's outside dangers. Now she lives in Chicago and teaches at DePaul University. Her stories have appeared in the *Southern Review*, *Kenyon Review* and other literary magazines. *At-Risk*, her first collection of stories, won the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction.

The dangers lurking around Gautier's characters hover as close as the puffs of the cigarette a mother smokes, or as the

fear when a car slows on its way through the neighborhood, or as the surprise flare of a firecracker that a kid has set off in the park across the street. And yet a period with such dangers is just another afternoon spent sitting on the curb, watching TV or shouting insults at the neighborhood boys or girls. The more subtle dangers here are loneliness, restlessness, temptation and despair. A teenage boy is afraid of being trapped in an apartment with his mother. A teenage mom is afraid of being suddenly isolated and ignored.

In "Boogiemen," two fatherless brothers, nine and 12, are enduring taunts and threats from their peers even as an ironclad protective bond is developing between them. In "Girl of Wisdom," two 15-year-old girls sit on a stoop calling out to boys and then taunting them. We don't know the girls' names (they're already anonymous?), but their insults are innocent. "Your breath stinks so bad I can smell it from across the street!" Then one girl shouts something

more suggestive to an older man who is watching them as he drives by, and he slows down.

Chandra calls out to him, "Hey Pops! My friend says she likes you."

"Stop," Melanie whispers.

The man looks at them, shaking his head in annoyance.

"For real!" Chandra cries.

"Then let her say it herself," the man says, his voice carrying.

Is the episode a foolish game or an entry point into prostitution? And just where is the line for this lonely, bored 15-year-old girl?

The sickening proximity of violence comes closest in "The Ease of Living," when 15-year-old Jason sees two of his friends accidentally killed by gunfire. Jason's not an innocent kid—his friends sell weed, steal Social Security checks and father kids—and he is a follower; he wants to keep up with them. Although he knows he's headed into trouble, he can't



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connect his behavior with the deaths he's seen. He needs friends.

Desperate, his mother takes precious dollars and sends him south to live with his elderly, disabled grandfather. His grandfather is able to talk tough love to this boy/man who is ambushed by nightmares and confused about what to do with himself. But the trip south is only a brief oasis in Jason's life. What will happen next, when his grandfather dies, or when he goes home?

In "Yearn," which ends the collection, 12-year-old Stephen lives in a neighborhood where everyone comes out at night. Teenagers flirt. Old men sit on the building stoop, and Stephen sees them every day. "His father could have been any of them—one day—if he had stayed." "Just once, he wanted to pull that shade up and not see them sitting there like always. He wanted his mother not to have to worry about him, not to have to cry."

Yet Stephen is pulled out of the apartment where his beloved mother and

grandmother are trying to keep him safe and outside, past the unemployed men, to the excitement of being with Kiki, a friend who always has plenty of cash and access to girls. "His mother was too worried about too many things. . . . The way [the boys] wore their jeans so low that they seemed to hang off their narrow behinds. And the way they carried pagers and cell phones as if they were doctors and lawyers even though they had no jobs and nowhere to go."

Stephen and Kiki are the names of the two boys who are killed in the first story. In the last story, we've been handed an eerie, unsettling flashback and the despair of wanting to change the story's ending but being powerless to do so. We may know who these boys are, and we may love them, but we can't help them to a safe place. Instead we're back at the beginning. "It was barely the summer—just the end of June—and already two teenaged boys had been killed." We've gotten to know some of the kids who are at risk all of the time.

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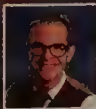
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ON Media

Leading man

In this year's holiday movie blitz, a live wire unites two very different films in the person of Christian Bale, who plays the lead in Scott Cooper's *Out of the Furnace* and in David O. Russell's *American Hustle*. Bale's physical presence weaves his two roles into a larger narrative about masculine anxieties and hopes.

In *Out of the Furnace* Bale plays Russell Baze, a modest, hardworking man in the Rust Belt of Pennsylvania. The movie is set in the very recent past (an early scene occurs on the eve of Obama's 2008 election), with the economic recession bristling below the surface. The steel mill where Russell works (and his father and his father's father before him) is about to close. His brother, Rodney (Casey Affleck), has served five tours in Iraq and Afghanistan and bears the scars of war on his body and mind. He has resorted to bare-knuckle boxing both for money and

to find an outlet for his rage. Their father, with little access to health care, is dying slowly in their childhood home.

While the wars hang over the Baze men and references are made to overseas outsourcing and the bum economy, this is not a political movie. Baze's enemy is not the economic and political forces hemming him in. It's Harlan DeGroat (Woody Harrelson), a meth-dealing boxing impresario who rules a backwoods underground in the mountains of New Jersey. The choice to pit Baze against a specific bad guy reduces the movie somewhat; we've seen this story in various guises many times before. But it also gives the film a steady focus: it is unabashedly about white working-class men and the now dying honor of their stoicism.

In *American Hustle*, Bale plays Irving Rosenfeld, a man who exudes excess



HEMMED IN: *Out of the Furnace* features Christian Bale as the stoical Russell Baze, who seeks justice in a ruthless world.

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CON GAME: In *American Hustle* Bale plays a small-time embezzler.

rather than lean resistance. But like Baze, Rosenfeld is a man struggling to define himself—in this case, amid ever-shifting con games. A slicker, faster paced and overall more satisfying film, *American Hustle* is loosely based on the 1978 Abscam FBI investigation—the so-called Arab scam—that convicted many U.S. politicians on bribery and corruption charges. Aided by his mistress and partner in crime, Sydney Prosser (played by an exhilarating Amy Adams), Rosenfeld finds himself at the heart of an FBI sting.

Pressed beyond his modest ambitions as a small-time crook, Rosenfeld wrangles with federal agents, U.S. senators and gambling mafia. Add to this an unstable wife and jealous mistress, both of whom might be playing him so as not to get played, and Irv's failing heart and elaborate comb-over can barely keep up. As cons within cons press loyalties on every side, the film is less about political corruption than the deep longing of its characters to find a piece of solid ground, something they can stake a life on.

Bale has played expansive roles before (as in *The Machinist* and *The Fighter*), but most moviegoers know him as Batman in Christopher Nolan's franchise that ruled the box office during its three-film run (2005 to 2012). Nolan and Bale's vision of Batman reflected our heroic longings in the early days of the war on terror—and then, by 2012, our

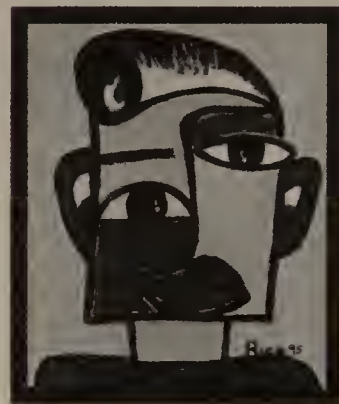
weary exhaustion with the corruption of that war: Batman was the suffering hero who did what was necessary to keep Gotham safe, even at great personal and psychic cost.

In the current postrecession malaise, tortured heroics seem out of place. This is not a world that can be made right by the theatrics of a brooding savior. Both Baze and Rosenfeld are flawed men in hard places, trying to figure out what it means to survive. They realize how narrow their choices are and how much controlled by external forces.

Baze straightens his spine and earnestly reaches for older models of self-assertion, in the mode of Clint Eastwood and Paul Newman. Rosenfeld swaggers and preens and hedges his bets. It is very easy to glorify the former and pretty hard to recommend the latter as an emblem of moral character. In the end, however, Rosenfeld finds solid ground and acts out of vulnerability and compromise. Baze, steadfast and unyielding, is bereft of everything he's ever loved. Bale makes both characters highly sympathetic, and both figures offer options for "being a man" without the easy resolution of a caped crusader.

The author is Kathryn Reklis, who teaches theology at Fordham University and is codirector of the Institute for Art, Religion and Social Justice at Union Theological Seminary.

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LIFE WORTH LIVING

3:00PM – 4:15PM LECTURE ONE: GIVING UP ON THE MEANING OF LIFE

7:30PM – 8:30PM LECTURE TWO: LIFE WORTH LIVING

by Philip Jenkins

 notes from the
GLOBAL CHURCH

An Irish peacemaker

The Catholic priest was carrying an ultra-secret document that could mark a breakthrough in one of the world's bloodiest conflicts. En route to deliver it, though, a humanitarian crisis forced him to stop: he tried, unsuccessfully, to prevent a mob from murdering an unarmed soldier. After giving the soldier last rites, he continued to carry his potent message—although he had to change the envelope, which had become soaked with blood.

Such a heroic story sounds almost as if it comes from a Catholic suspense novel, but it really did happen—in Belfast in 1988. The priest in question was Alec Reid of the Redemptorist Order, who died in November at the age of 82.

Although little known in North America, in Ireland itself he is lauded for his critical role in ending the decades-long struggle between the (Catholic) Provisional Irish Republican Army and the British government. His mighty example of Christian peacemaking cries out to be remembered.

Alec Reid grew up in the Irish Republic, although later he moved to the north to live in a Belfast monastery. He never lost a sense of the profound structural injustices imposed on Northern Ireland's Catholics. In 1968, he sympathized with the surging civil rights movement, inspired by the example of Martin Luther King Jr. Peaceful protest, though,

degenerated into violent ethnic and religious confrontations and savage rioting, as the Provisionals launched their terrorist campaign. (Homicidal Protestant militias added their share of carnage.) Some 1,750 perished between 1971 and 1976, including a thousand civilians. Hugely destructive bomb attacks occurred both on the British mainland and in the Irish Republic.

By the time the struggle ended (more or less) in 1998, it had claimed 3,500 lives and devastated a whole generation. It had seemed like the war would never end. It is hard to overstate the deep polarization of the two main players, the British government and the Provisionals, each officially pledged to an absolute refusal to negotiate. In the 1980s, British media were even prohibited from broadcasting the voices of Republican leaders—not just the IRA but also the Sinn Féin party, which is generally regarded as the movement's political wing. In turn, the IRA refused to contemplate any agreement that fell short of total victory.

At a time when the gulf between the sides seemed unbridgeable, Alec Reid became the bridge. Throughout, he preached peace and also followed up with practical initiatives. In 1982, he approached Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams in an attempt to free a captive soldier. That

effort failed, but he kept those channels open.

In the late 1980s, he established contacts between Northern Ireland's major Catholic parties, the revolutionary Sinn Féin and the peaceful and constitutional-minded Social Democratic and Labour Party. He urged the two to form a common front to work for peaceful change. It was while carrying messages between the two parties that Reid faced the deadly interruption of the soldier's killing. Still, contacts continued and were extended to include the leaders of the Irish Republic. Reid's negotiations effectively ended Sinn Féin's isolation.

Reid claimed no magical powers to halt violence. Rather, he took advantage of the mounting pressures that the paramilitaries faced in sustaining their campaign. For one thing, strong evidence pointed to British penetration of the IRA leadership at very high levels. Time and again, IRA attempts to launch violent spectacles collapsed bloodily in ways that suggested the British had advance knowledge of their most secret plans. After 1989, moreover, the fall of communism in Europe dried up IRA hopes for major arms supplies, as British intelligence was exercising surveillance over their international networks.

Surely, there had to be some way out of the spiral of

killing? The Republicans accepted Reid as a negotiator because of his absolute integrity, his indomitable personal courage and his impeccable credentials as a Catholic priest. Everyone could trust him—even when he maintained, against major evidence to the contrary, that Sinn Féin really did want to renounce violence.

The peace process was lengthy, and an early truce in 1994 collapsed. But the momentum was irresistible, leading to the celebrated Good Friday Agreement of 1998.

Although stubborn Republican extremists still operate, the worst of the war is long over, and Northern Ireland is rebuilding. Sinn Féin today pursues its goals through the ballot box.

In alliance with some Protestant clergy, Reid took on another task that was extremely difficult but much more hopeful—ensuring that the different militias genuinely had decommissioned their weapons so they could never be reused. The process was completed in 2005. He then sought still further challenges as a mediator between the Basque extremist movement and the Spanish government.

The Christian tradition calls peacemakers blessed. Doubly blessed are those who work to end a conflict that seems so utterly resistant to human intervention.

Philip Jenkins recently wrote Laying Down the Sword.

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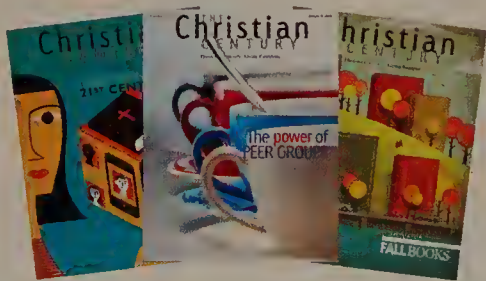
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Holden Village—The Board of Holden Village seeks a DIRECTOR OR TEAM OF DIRECTORS for a five-year term of service to begin January 1, 2015. A position description and detailed information about nominations and applications are posted at www.holdenvillage.org/about-us/board/call-e/.

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Tomorrow, by Rick LaMarre

Artist and illustrator Rick LaMarre imagines what the disciple Peter would do the day or two after denying Jesus. Would he return to fishing, the world he knows? Would he go fishing but find himself unable to focus on the work? “What do you do between the time when you blow up your whole world and the time when God rescues you?” wonders LaMarre. “How is it when faith is the only thing you have, yet you feel you don’t even deserve that?”

Art selection and comment by Lil Copan, a painter and editor in Boston.

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Twenty Questions

Why the Church Needs to Ask More Questions Than It Answers

with **Lillian Daniel & Martin B. Copenhaver**

Jesus asked eight times as many questions as he answered. And yet, the church is stereotyped in our culture as an institution that believes it has the answers. Could Christians embrace the teaching methods Jesus used and ask more questions than we answer?

- Tuesday:** What questions did Jesus ask?
Wednesday: How do questions extend conversation?
Thursday: Why does the church answer questions no one is asking?
Friday: How do we follow an inquisitive Savior into the future?

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Registration: \$275

The Rev. **Lillian Daniel** is the author of the 2013 book *When Spiritual But Not Religious Is Not Enough: Seeing God in Surprising Places, Even the Church*. She has served as the senior minister of the First Congregational Church, Glen Ellyn, Illinois, since 2004.



The Rev. **Martin B. Copenhaver** is author of the 2013 book *Living Faith while Holding Doubts*. He has been senior pastor of Wellesley Congregational Church in Massachusetts since 1994 and has been named president-elect of Andover Newton Theological Seminary.

Daniel and Copenhaver coauthored *This Odd and Wondrous Calling: The Public and Private Lives of Two Ministers*.